



**Being Here Now: Performance, Presentness
and the Opening to Wonder**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Statement of originality

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the experience of 'presentness' in the performance context, drawing on theoretical investigation, case studies and research through practice to consider how performance can invite the spectator into awareness of bodied co-presence in a shared space of being. Following Serres and Sheets-Johnstone, it argues that sensing and animation are primary in the subject's awareness of her own being, and key to a sense of presence-in-the-world. Performance, encouraging attention to its own present moment, can offer a privileged context for this bodily awareness of being. Phenomenology is proposed as a key mode of analysis of the performance experience of both performer and spectator, as well as central to my concern in practice with bringing awareness to a shared present moment. Case studies from my own and other artists' practice are informed by engagement with philosophical analyses of co-presence (Lévinas, Irigaray), considering how particular forms may invite sensory attention to the spectator's own being as well as to the performance. Analysis of one-to-one performances, and durational performances involving materials, investigates whether and how these modes can invite spectators into a sense of being-present-with, and/or self-presence. The central performance element in the submission raises the question of how mind and materials 'think' together, and how conceptual ideas may be advanced through practical thinking, as well as vice versa. This reflection is taken up in a consideration (following Sheets-Johnstone and Ingold) of how moving allows us a sense of being in the world, how thinking operates on multiple levels, in body as well as intellect, and how 'thinking' may be apparent in the movement of working with materials, and in the moving body itself. Finally, it is argued that by inviting the spectator into this sensory, bodily enmeshed apprehension of being-in-the-world, performance can return us to the space of everyday wonder.

Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Note on the text	7
Introduction	8
Chapter 1	
Other/self: Negotiating the between in one-to-one performance	58
Interlude – Practice (I)	
Sharing bodied space	106
Chapter 2	
Phases of matter: The forgetting and remembering of the air	116
Interlude – Practice (II)	
Performing matter	146
Chapter 3	
Performing the material: Moving matter, memory and time	153
Conclusion	
Ending and beginning in wonder	194
References cited	211
Appendix 1: documentation of work cited	USB
Appendix 2a: <i>Talking Matter</i> (outline)	USB
Appendix 2b: <i>Talking Matter</i> (documentation)	USB

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Note on the Text

The text of this thesis follows the conventions recommended by the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA).

Introduction

March 1996. Early on in my dance training, I am at the Royal Opera House in London to see Giselle, in which the central role is performed by the Royal Ballet's principal guest artist and undoubted star attraction, the extraordinary dancer Sylvie Guillem. The cheapest seats in the house are the 'slips', hard wooden benches at the back end of the uppermost gallery that face the opposite side of the auditorium, at right angles to the stage. In order to see the performance at all, I have to twist around in my seat, so that I am half on and half off the bench, and crane my neck further around and forward to peer at the remote figures on the stage far below. While it is impossible to feel comfortable in this position, I do my best to focus on the movement on stage. Guillem's virtuosity is far beyond anything I will ever aspire to, and I am less interested in gaping at her extensions than in witnessing something of the quality of her performance, and how her star status might be played out in her relationship with her co-performers. But the moment that strikes home is when my own body comes forcefully into focus as the discomfort in my neck, back and right leg bring me back to the awkwardness of my own position. I have a sudden realisation that just as I am aware of pressure, tension and stiffness, Guillem too is experiencing physical sensations that may or may not be of discomfort or pain (I later playfully imagine thirst, pain in her feet, sweat inside her costume – ordinary sensations in an ordinary body). However different our situations, we are here, in the same space, in bodies that would recognise and resonate with the physical experience of one another. As Drew Leder puts it, my 'dys-appearing body' brings my bodily presence to the forefront of my awareness. Yet something about the witnessing of the performance at the same time allows me to grasp it in a shared space of similarly dys-

appearing, and disappearing, bodies.¹ This moment stays with me over months and then years, not for the distantly-viewed performance but because of this realisation of myself as spectator, a living, breathing, bodied being sharing a space with the living, breathing, bodied being I have come to watch.

February 2006. I am sitting at a table in a small room, opposite another person. We are both silent; on the table between us sit a minidisc recorder, with a microphone pointed towards the other person, a glass of water, and a small clock on which I can see the time. We have been sitting in silence for some minutes; I have kept my gaze on this person, who has occasionally looked up to meet my eyes, but more often looks down or away to the side. I have watched them shift slightly in the chair, look at the glass of water as if they wanted to drink but not pick it up, have heard them sigh once or twice, seen them shift their gaze again. I have noticed the drone of planes going overhead, once a child's shout from outside, the rumble of a heating system. As the person looks up once again, I have a sense of something settling in the room, a kind of deep quietness that adds depth to the silence that was there before. I feel suddenly at one with this person in this moment, profoundly moved by the access they have given me to themselves, the openness they show in sitting quietly opposite me, allowing me to listen to and record their silence, to make them the focus of my attention.

This is one iteration of my one-to-one performance and CD project audience (2005-2013), which I discuss in more detail below (see

¹ Leder suggests that it is 'at times of dysfunction or problematic operation' that the body 'dysappears', becoming 'present-at-hand' (in Heidegger's sense) to conscious awareness rather than 'ready-to-hand', unconsciously available: 'at times of dys-appearance, the body is often (though not always) experienced as away, apart from the self.' Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 85, 87. For 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand', see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 99 (discussed in more detail below).

Interlude – Practice (I)).² In recording over 150 of these silences since 2005, I have felt moved and privileged to experience such moments of being-with on many, although not all, occasions.

This thesis centres on the experience of being present, and how performance may offer a space for engagement with a sense of presentness on the part of both perceiver and performer³ – a focus that draws me on to a concomitant investigation of the sense of wonder that such aliveness to the present moment has the capacity to generate. My research emerges from a core concern in my own performance-making practice with what it is to be present in and with performance, and how performance may offer a space of engagement with both the perceiver's own sense of presentness and an awareness of common bodily being in the shared moment of performance. Since I began making performance in 1998 one of the abiding concerns of my work has been the experience of being (in) a body, how it is that a subject-body comes into being through a continuous accumulation of physical, affective and psychic experience and intellectual reflection, what it is to live in the moment-by-moment shifts in bodily being in response to the constant flow of myriad external and internal stimuli that build our sense of being-in-the-world. My long engagement with a variety of body-based practices has been the spur for an ongoing enquiry into how performance might offer a space that invites the spectator to engage with the similar processes of growth, accumulation and change in her own body, and also allows each of us to enter into awareness of a common embodied being in a present performance moment, thereby opening the possibility of wonder.

² I leave the gender ambiguous here because my experience of receiving the silences in this project is both of uniquely individual presences in every case, and of no marked gender distinctions in the way contributors behave and appear in the interaction.

³ In this thesis, I predominantly use the terms 'spectator' and 'participant' to refer to the person or persons to whom a performance is addressed. Given that these terms essentially emphasise the structural relationship between performer and witness, I occasionally use other terms to point to the various levels of engagement with performance that the conventional terms tend to elide.

My interest in, and indeed insistence on, presentness in the performance moment stems from a perennial fascination with, and delight in, bodied being. Through a long and continuing process of apprenticeship in movement and bodywork, including (but not limited to) martial arts, conservatoire dance training, sustained engagement with release-based dance and improvisation, long-time practice of Body Weather,⁴ regular Scaravelli and Ashtanga yoga practice, and a training in bodywork based on the principles of Body-Mind Centering® and Authentic Movement,⁵ in combination with intermittent practice of Zen and Vipassana meditation, I have developed a personal and artistic practice rooted in the aliveness of the body, and profoundly informed by sensory engagement with the world and focused witnessing of my physical, affective and intellectual response to it. My experience of this practice has been that it opens the potential for moments of intense, yet everyday, wonder – a wonder that is freely available to each of us simply by virtue of being (in) a body in the world: as Raymond Tallis suggests, the most obvious reason for being in ‘an almost permanent state of wonder’ is the very fact of existing at all.⁶ Descriptions of moments of such quiet wonder recur throughout this thesis, not only as evidentiary examples but also in accounts of performance that harness this profoundly phenomenal engagement with the world. These form the substrate of an argument for ‘presentness’ as the ground of all performance, and for performance as a particular mode of attention that precisely opens the gates to such moments. I argue, *contra* Leder, that an awareness of bodily being is by no means always an experience of alienation. The intertwined experiences of presentness and wonder, and the paths by which they may be accessed, are core preoccupations of this research project.

⁴ Body Weather is a Japanese movement-based artform developed by Min Tanaka during the second half of the 20th century, and influenced by *butoh*. A key element of the practice is a focus on the body’s sensory engagement with the world. See Body Weather Database, <<http://bodyweather.blogspot.co.uk/>> [accessed 3 November 2017].

⁵ Integrative Bodywork and Movement Therapy: see <<http://www.ibmt.co.uk/Pages/About-IBMT.html>>. For Body-Mind Centering, see <<http://www.bodymindcentering.com/about>>. For Authentic Movement, see <<http://authenticmovementcommunity.org/about>> [all accessed 10 July 2017].

⁶ Raymond Tallis, *In Defence of Wonder and Other Philosophical Reflections* (Durham: Acumen, 2012), p. 1.

Research questions

This thesis thus crystallises a long and still ongoing process of research through practice, and takes a reflective view on the questions that arise from this consistent focus. The particular questions I seek to address here, through the intersection of practice and theoretical reflection, include:

- What does it mean to be present? How do I know that I am?
- What aspects of this experience might offer insight into aspects of being, or suggest new ways of approaching the world?
- Are there ways that performance can invite a more direct engagement with the sense of being present? If so, what particular modes or forms of performance might open up specific aspects of this experience?
- What ethical questions might be opened up by the experience of intersubjective presence, and being present to the world, in performance? How can performance offer a space to address these?
- What is the link between the sense of presentness and the experience of wonder? How might performance open the potential for the experience of such present-moment wonder?

The problem of ‘presence’

The question of ‘presence’ is not a new one for performance studies. While post-modern performance from the 1960s onwards challenged the notion of auratic presence, performance studies has also called into question post-modern performance’s argument for ‘real’ or ‘actual’ or ‘live’ as opposed to ‘represented’ presence,⁷ as well as claims that such work democratises the relationship between performer and spectator, and the assumption of a kind of

⁷ See e.g. Elinor Fuchs, ‘Presence and the revenge of writing: Re-thinking theatre after Derrida’, *Performing Arts Journal*, 9.2/3, 1985: 163-173.

egalitarian co-presence.⁸ Indeed, the idea that performance has any kind of positive 'presence' is problematised by the critique of representation posited by deconstructionist philosophy in general, and by performance theory in particular: as Peggy Phelan puts it, 'presence is doubt [...] doubt is the signature of presence',⁹ and her famous dictum that performance is characterised by its own absence, or 'disappearance'¹⁰ has formed the ground of a focus on performance as ephemeral moment rather than being-in-itself. While Schneider counters this 'disappearance' with a focus on the 'remaining' of performance,¹¹ the trace thus privileged equally removes the centre of performance from its existence in and between present bodies. Cormac Power points out how the deconstructionist thinking of Derrida in particular has fuelled challenges to the assumption of performance as the presence of performer in the presence of spectator.¹² 'Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been breached.'¹³ The vanishing present is only available to us through representation or reflection: 'the present in general is not originary, but reconstituted, [...] is not the absolute, fully alive and constitutive form of experience, [...] there is no purity of the living present'.¹⁴

Yet notwithstanding these various challenges to the idea that there is such a thing as 'presence', that we can be 'present' in any meaningful sense or that we can experience 'the present', the fact stubbornly remains that in order even to engage with this thinking, we have first, in commonsense understanding, to be, here. In order to experience performance, as performer, participant or spectator

⁸ See e.g. Amelia Jones, '"Presence" in absentia: Experiencing performance as documentation', *Art Journal* 56.4 (1997), 11-18.

⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London/New York, Routledge, 1993), p. 115, 180.

¹⁰ Phelan, p. 146.

¹¹ Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance remains', *Performance Research* 6.2 (2001): 100-108.

¹² Cormac Power, *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2008).

¹³ Jacques Derrida, 'Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation', in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 341-368 (p. 366). Except where otherwise noted, translations from French are my own.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', in *L'écriture et la différence*, pp. 293-340 (p. 314).

(and whether or not it is experienced in a space where all parties are physically present together), I need to be here in body. Presentness, the fact of being here now in bodily form, is the ground of the performance experience, as it is of any and all ways of engaging with the world, at any level. As Merleau-Ponty points out, however 'unreal' the object perceived, the perception is present to the perceiver. Questioning the 'reality' of the perceived present cannot alter the fact of the perception itself, and the self is always already there by virtue of the act of perceiving: 'perception as knowledge of the present is the central phenomenon which makes possible the unity of the ego, and with it the idea of objectivity and truth.'¹⁵ For Merleau-Ponty, self and world are not separate, contained entities:

My body and the world are no longer objects co-ordinated together by the kind of functional relationships that physics establishes. The system of experience in which they intercommunicate is not spread out before me and ranged over by a constituting consciousness. I *have* the world as an incomplete individual, through the agency of my body as the potentiality of this world, and I have the positing of objects through that of my body, or conversely the positing of my body through that of objects [...] in a real implication, and because my body is a movement towards the world and the world my body's point of support.¹⁶

We have no experience of being, of thinking, of the world, without being in body (and 'out-of-body' experiences are themselves dependent on an awareness of, and return to, bodily being). Or as Jean-Luc Nancy trenchantly states: '*the ontology of the body is ontology itself: being does not precede or underlie the phenomenon here.*'¹⁷ Moreover, however impossible it is to actually be 'in' the moment of now, the (common) sense we make of everyday experience is of being in what Daniel Stern calls 'the present moment': 'we are

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 52.

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 408.

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. by Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 14 (original emphasis; my translation from French parallel text).

subjectively alive and conscious only *now*. [...] The only time of raw subjective reality, of phenomenal experience, is the present moment.¹⁸ This 'present moment', Stern suggests, as a gestalt, takes several seconds to unfold, '[crossing] the mental stage [...] it traces a temporal shape like a passing musical phrase [...] it puts time back into experience.'¹⁹

A 'present moment', in Stern's sense, is not necessarily a moment of sensing one's own presence: awareness may be focused on any of an infinite range of physical sensations, affects, ideas, or a combination or succession of these. As a spectator I may be so engrossed in what is happening before me, or distracted by my own thoughts or the behaviour of other spectators, that I do not have any conscious awareness of my own presence. The present moment may also comport a sense of absence:

you can be attending to something, here and now, but at the same time be preoccupied by something that happened yesterday or is happening now in the next room. At such times you feel only weakly in the present moment [...] But [...] you are still in the present moment, only there are two experiences (at least) going on in parallel, like a duet. [...]

Phenomenologically, there is no escape. Rather, experiences in the present can be polyphonic or polytemporal.²⁰

My contention in this thesis is that, *pace* Derrida, it is possible to have an experience of being present in a present moment. The 'presentness' that I deal with here is not the disembodied contemplation of passing moments, but the always partial and necessarily ambiguous sense of being-here-now, of a subjectivity interwoven with a world. I use the word 'sense' advisedly: the awareness that I am interested in is more than a cognitive grasp of existence; it is the experience of being that is constituted by the interweaving of physical sensation, affect and intellect at any given point of time. As such it is of course subject to enormous variation, from the effortful mental grappling with the

¹⁸ Daniel Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁹ Stern, p. 4.

²⁰ Stern, pp. 24-25.

complex concept of non-presence to the simple realisation (and virtually simultaneous fulfilment) of a need to shift position in my chair or scratch the mosquito bite on my elbow. Various aspects of immediate experience will come to the fore at different points, shaping what Stern calls the 'vitality affect', the dynamic intensity and temporal flow of the moment: *'The felt experience of the present moment is whatever is in awareness now, during the moment being lived.'*²¹

Leaving to one side the deconstructionist problematisation of 'presence', then, we are left with the inescapable fact of an experience of *being here now*. Before exploring how performance may harness, enhance or alter this awareness, I want to consider in more detail how this experience arises. How is it that I come to feel present? What is required in order to bring this sense of presentness to the fore?

The 'felt experience' that Stern evokes is more than just a mental cognition; it is grounded in a bodily being that holds its own history and sense of time. Awareness of being present is a fundamentally phenomenal experience, what Eugene Gendlin calls a 'felt sense'.²² It is rooted in basic building blocks of lived experience that are part of our being from the earliest moments of life. Through the intrinsic enmeshing of my somatosensory being with the being-of-the-world, in each moment I experience myself, and the world around me, as inescapably and always already *there*. This experience is the ground of what Heidegger calls Dasein, the particular mode of being that, by virtue of having consciousness, has a concern toward own-being and world.²³ At the most basic level, sensory perception tells me that a body-mind I identify as myself is engaging with its own being and with the world. Awareness of my own presence arises out of my physical engagement with a material world: as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues, I can be conscious only because I exist as a

²¹ Stern, p. 32 (original emphasis).

²² 'A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. [...] [It is] the body's physical sense of a problem, or of some concern or situation. It is a physical sense of meaning.' Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, revised and updated edn (London: Rider, 2003), pp. 32, 69.

²³ 'Taking up relationships towards the world is possibly only *because* Dasein, as being-in-the-world, is as it is.' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 84.

body, and a body that moves.²⁴ And the experience of being temporally present, in the arc of a 'present moment', is a function of this inextricable enmeshment in sensing and movement, as Bergson argues:

My present is [...] at once sensation and movement; and since my present forms an indivisible whole, this movement must belong to this sensation, prolong it in action. Hence I conclude that my present consists in a combined system of sensation and movement. My present is, in its essence, sensori-motor.²⁵

In considering the experience, and work, of presentness, a first task of this research has therefore been to investigate key elements of day-to-day experience that contribute to the subjective sense of being present. This investigation has drawn me to engage with the work of a number of thinkers who have informed my own thinking and methodology through the course of my research. Bergson's succinct summary points to sensing and movement as two crucial elements in the bodily understanding of presentness. In considering these in more depth I draw on Michel Serres' account of sensing as a primary mode of engagement with the world, and the ground of thinking, and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's analysis of movement as the foundation of both organic life and consciousness. Building on these readings, I take up Tim Ingold's extended reflections on how humans interweave with our world, together with Luce Irigaray's examination of the interface between body and body/world, to explore how being and consciousness extend out into, and are received from, the world in a moment-by-moment relationship of contingency and becoming. Irigaray further offers a nuanced reflection on the special relationship with the other that is engagement with another subjectivity, which is thus particularly germane to the analysis of performance. And while I focus on these aspects of experience separately through the work of these thinkers, their writing, together

²⁴ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, expanded second edn (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2011). I return to Sheets-Johnstone's discussion of animation as the foundation of consciousness in detail below.

²⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matière et Mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2010), p. 153.

with insights from Stern, Merleau-Ponty and others reveal these keystones of being-in-the-world as fundamentally intermeshed in their contribution to the subject's sense of being in the world in the present moment. My enquiry has led me further to consider specific experiences of presentness to which performance has the potential to offer privileged access, as well as how and why such experiences open the potential for small moments of wonder. In the chapters that follow, I introduce case studies that shed particular light on these experiences, and consider them through the thinking of theorists who focus on these aspects of experience. Here I consider in more detail how these four key theorists engage the questions I am concerned with, and outline particular strands of their thinking that have informed my analysis as well as pointing to other sources that help to illuminate these. I show how these distinct approaches inform and complement one another, and how bringing them together articulates a more complex understanding of one of my primary questions: how do we know that we are? While I draw out individual aspects of the experience of presentness, and present-moment wonder, in relation to each of these authors in turn, their analysis offers a consistent reminder of the multi-stranded complexity of lived experience.

Sensory being and sense-making: Michel Serres

We begin with sensing. Our first, and always primary, experience of ourselves and the world is through our senses. The first nerves to myelinate, early in embryonic development, are the vestibular nerves, which provide information on our movement in relation to gravity. We are already in relationship with a world. Information is fed to the developing central nervous system, in turn stimulating further movement as the foetus develops proprioception, the sense of its own movement, and gradually accumulates sensory input from the familiar five 'special senses'.²⁶ After birth (in itself a uniquely powerful somatosensory event), the infant's continuing development is founded in a

²⁶ Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), pp. 27-28.

sensory exploration of self and world; as each successive stage of development emerges, new sensory information is absorbed through a testing of body in relation to world. Processing and application of sensory information becomes increasingly sophisticated; from simply sensing where she is in gravity, through explorations in touch, smell, taste, hearing and vision the infant learns to orient herself towards or away from an object, to move in a desired direction with growing precision and dexterity. Sensing in turn becomes increasingly refined, as she focuses with greater acuity and comprehension of her bodily relationship with her environment. Though as adults most of us process much of this information entirely unconsciously, it is immediately present at moments when we need to rely on it – present-at-hand, in Heidegger's sense that it becomes conspicuous, demanding our attention, standing out from the 'ready-to-hand' background where it usually resides.²⁷ Throughout our lives, our sensing body is our home ground: any information we receive or experience comes first of all through our senses. We are never not at home, for even in places of severe self-alienation, this distress is based on first knowing (or rather, being) a sensing body. If we are to feel absent from our bodies, or our world, we first of all need a body-world to be abstracted from.

'The body knows by itself how to say I.'²⁸ Sensing brings us into body, and into the present moment, the point where the embodied being knows her own being. In his key work *Les cinq sens* [*The Five Senses*], Michel Serres offers a rich reflection on the nature of sensing, and the experience of living as a sensing subject. Through finely detailed, often viscerally arresting accounts of his own sensory experience, intertwined with a wide-ranging engagement with sensory experience from landscape to the visual arts, Serres presents sensing not as a set of discrete perceptions but rather an intricately woven tapestry of myriad impressions that intertwine and ripple out across the variegated

²⁷ Heidegger distinguishes between the ready-to-hand, the everyday substrate of body and world that we have no need to attend to, which 'is not grasped theoretically at all [...] but must, as it were, withdraw [zurückziehen] in order to be ready-to-hand authentically' and the present-at-hand, the 'conspicuous' or 'obstinate' things that demand attention by their refusal or failure to perform or fit into the ready-to-hand. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 99, 104.

²⁸ Michel Serres, *Les cinq sens* (Paris: Grasset, 1985), p. 16.

landscape of the sensorium. As Steven Connor points out, the book's subtitle, *Philosophie des corps mêlés* [*A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*], comes closer to the core of Serres' project, pointing not only to the mingling of the senses, and sense impression, within individual bodies, but also to the mixing with the sensory world (including other such mingled bodies) that is ultimately our sole source of knowledge.²⁹ The conventional separation of sensory information into distinct categories (the five 'special senses', plus proprioception and kinaesthesia) determines much of our thinking about sensory perception. But as Merleau-Ponty notes, no sensory perception is discrete: though most of us may be habitually unaware of the contribution of 'other' senses, none of what we identify as individual sense impressions would be comprehensible unless they were inherently interwoven in a global fabric of sensing that weaves the sensing body with the sensed environment.³⁰ As Gendlin suggests, we need to 'recognize that the old reduction of experience to five separated kinds of sense data is an indispensable analysis, but it is a cognitive symbolic cultural product, *not the start of experience*.'³¹

Serres's project is founded on this understanding: his rendering of sensory perception is not isolated, discrete sensation, but a multilayered web of shifting, intertwined impressions that give each present moment both a depth and a fluidity of being. The book's five chapters address not so much individual senses as a series of tropes which Serres engages as ways into, and central metaphors for, the experience of the *sensible* as a whole.³² And while the sensorium as mode of being and as world forms the substance of the argument, underlying this is a concern with knowledge and ways of knowing, grounded in a rooted opposition to the assumption of knowledge as the exclusive realm

²⁹ Steven Connor, 'Introduction', in Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*, trans. by Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), pp. 1-16 (p. 3).

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. 15-16.

³¹ Eugene Gendlin, 'Implicit precision', in *Knowing Without Thinking*, ed. by Zdravko Radman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 141-166 (p. 155; original emphasis).

³² Given that there is no English equivalent of the dual sense of the French '*sensible*' (both 'to be sensed' and 'sensing'), I cite the French term here (italicised to indicate this) in order to retain the two aspects of the term. This is in part a response to Serres' own strategy of working from both within and outside the subjective body, and his account of it as never either unboundaried or closed.

of the intellect.³³ This understanding of the knowing body is at the heart of my own project, both in my practice and in the present research.

Sensory engagement with the world is material, and even the ostensibly remote sense of vision is presented here as tactility, physical engagement with a physical world, offering a more materially substantial version of Merleau-Ponty's 'chiasmus' in which vision and world are interwoven.³⁴ For Serres this 'mingling' or 'mixture' is of the essence of bodily being, but it is not a fusion: individual elements remain distinct even as they are inextricably woven into one another in the apprehension of the world. It is thus that we are able to speak of touch, hearing, taste as individual senses, though we can never isolate them in the embodied experience of sense impression. The 'senses' rely on the background of the entire sensorium, and ultimately the fabric of tactility from which it derives, to *make sense*. This fabric Serres identifies with a sort of 'sixth sense' which he names '*le sens commun*' – the sense that unifies all our sensory impressions and resides in the skin, the membrane of passage between interior and exterior that brings the sensorium into being. We continually build our bodies, and our world, piecemeal, from local sensations: 'The body is composed like a book: a topology of stitching, scraps are brought together as they flee [...] I taste, my mouth exists. I sense, thus a piece comes into existence'.³⁵ The skin unites these fragments into the 'common sense' and allows them to flow into and through one another, to mingle and re-separate: '[the] skin, common fabric with its singular concentrations, unfolds sensibility'.³⁶ Mingling is equally inherent in our relationship with the world: the mixing of sense impressions derives not just from variegation within the body but from our moment-to-moment shifting, flickering, pulsating interbeing with the substance we conventionally recognise as outside our 'selves':

³³ I consider the implications of this engagement with the world in my discussion of movement and material knowing in Chapter 3.

³⁴ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). I return to the 'chiasmus' or '*entrelacs*' in my discussion of the meeting between body and world, body and other, in Chapter 2 below.

³⁵ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 247-249.

³⁶ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 51.

Immobile like flora, vital and animal, primordial as an element, finished and feet held in one place, thorax expanded to the horizon, head cloud and light, neurons flying through the vastness of the universe, from the mountaintop to the stars, pores shivering by the fire, contracted, dilated, dense and dispersed, dissolved, liquid and forged by the hammer and brasier of metamorphosis, I am nothing other than the other things, plus the other people, of the world.³⁷

Indeed, we can only receive, and know, the world, because we are of this same matter. Common sense is more than just the kaleidoscopic mingling of individual sense impressions through the unifying fabric of skin, more than just the individual's unified perception and awareness of her own embodied being: it is, as it were, the world body's knowing of itself.³⁸ The contact between self and world is not so much the meeting of self and other as the touch of same on other-same, the 'chiasmus' but also the meeting of the lips or labia evoked by Luce Irigaray.³⁹ I return to this reflection on the interpenetration of body/world throughout this thesis, considering its articulation in the relation with the other in one-to-one performance (Chapter 1), in the continual interchange with the surrounding air (Chapter 2), and in the intermeshed matter of moving body and world (Chapter 3). This 'half-openness' of being is key to the mutual engagement of performer and spectator (or rather, co-participants) in performance, for it is here, in its invitation to attend to the other in the unfolding moment, that performance lives, and calls forth the wonder of the yet-to-be-known.

Sensory perception arrives moment-to-moment, a continual flow between body and world, so that we are constantly negotiating with the contingency of the now. Our engagement with the world therefore depends on a process of wayfinding, navigating a path through, and in conversation with, a body-world

³⁷ Michel Serres *Variations sur le corps* (Paris: Le Pommier-Fayard, 1999), p. 80.

³⁸ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 339.

³⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p. 156. I consider Irigaray's address to the material encounter between self and world in more detail below, and return to her exploration of the meeting between 'self' and 'other' in Chapters 1 and 2.

that is in constant movement. To journey through life, and the world, is to contend everywhere with change and chance, constantly improvising and adapting, making up and reinventing a way of being as we negotiate the accidents of the terrain. For Serres, the way to forge our path of being is not to rely on the pre-mapped routes of received knowledge, but to engage again and again with the contingency of circumstance that our senses abundantly feed to us. Codified knowledge itself can only come into being through this interplay with circumstance – ‘delicate negotiations on the knife-edge between knowledge and non-knowledge’.⁴⁰ The improvisation with the contingency of the moment that is the essence of performance’s ‘liveness’ partakes of this negotiation, and I take up the role of improvisation in performance, in everyday life, and in the sense of being present, in Chapter 3. In my conclusion I discuss further how allowing ourselves to inhabit this improvisatory wayfinding equally opens the path to wonder.

Movement is key to the sense of self: sensation roams through the body, our attention drawn to myriad details and processes from moment to moment, and we cannot know our selves until we move. ‘the body [...] loves movement, [...] only knows itself, immediately and without language, in and through its impulsive energy’.⁴¹ In his later book, *Variations sur le corps*, Serres shifts from skin as the unifying ground of sensory perception to suggest that it is in fact movement that ‘makes sense’: ‘[the] body in movement federates the senses and unifies them in itself.’⁴²

If ‘common sense’ is what enables us to know ourselves and our world, it is only because the world is always there for us, always already ‘given’. Evocations of grace, whether explicitly named as such or implied through delicate and intimate descriptions of sensory experience, recur throughout Serres’ lyrical celebration of sensory being. So far is this ‘given’ from the gift

⁴⁰ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 323.

⁴¹ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 348.

⁴² Serres, *Variations*, p. 17.

economy's demand for reciprocation⁴³ that, Serres argues, it should not be even be called so: 'Sensation, freely given, requires no payment in any currency. Never call it given: there is no obligation to reciprocate.'⁴⁴ This sense of the unlooked-for gift resonates with the experience of wonder that forms a core thread of this thesis; it points to the uncommodifiable generosity of performance that exceeds its economic frame, through the gifts of being and of attention shared between performer and spectator.

Insisting on the primacy of sensory engagement as the foundation for understanding and reflection, Serres contends that it is through bodily sensation, not language, that knowledge, and ultimately wisdom, arise. The 'philosophy of mingled bodies' is not just a reflection on the nature of bodily being; the book can also be read as an account of the body's own philosophy, the philosophy that the body bodies forth, and ultimately *is* (rather than an externally located, detached philosophical account *of* these bodies). In this sense it is a philosophy not of abstract, removed consideration of mingled bodies, but philosophy as matter, movement, forged in a language restored to the flesh from which it originated. This insistence on the thinking of the body resonates powerfully with my own concern, particularly in *Talking Matter* (the practice element of this submission), with the reflection articulated in practices other than language. I return to this consideration both in my practice submission and in Chapter 3.

⁴³ In his *Essai sur le don* [Essay on the Gift], anthropologist Marcel Mauss presents a model of economic practice in 'archaic' societies based on the exchange of gifts and in particular, the obligation to reciprocate; he argues that in modern societies too 'a considerable part of our life still stands in this same atmosphere of the gift, of mingled duty and liberty.' The notion of the 'gift economy' has been developed subsequently in relation to a wide variety of other practices of gift exchange. Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don: Forme et raison d'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (Paris: PUF, 2012), p. 213.

⁴⁴ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 239.

‘From the very beginning, we sense ourselves moving.’⁴⁵ Sensory engagement with a body-world is central to the experience of being present, and to knowing. But sensing itself is only possible because I live in a moving body. In *The Primacy of Movement* Maxine Sheets-Johnstone centres her investigation on animation as the key to life and to consciousness. And while drawing widely on theoretical, scientific and philosophical literature, she continually regrounds her thesis in the direct experience of embodied practice, and in ‘the things themselves’: ‘We take the phenomena themselves as the point of departure, not theory, and earnestly inquire into what we observe to be living realities.’⁴⁶ Her project is in effect not so much to understand how consciousness arises as to shed light on what it *is* – both in evolutionary terms and in the unique individual. She posits consciousness not as a state or attribute of being but rather as a process that depends on animation as the central fact and necessary condition of being. My practical and theoretical exploration of what it is to be present itself emerges from a movement practice, and I therefore turn to Sheets-Johnstone’s work as a second key strand in developing this understanding.

We are born into movement: ‘[p]rimal animation is the foundational liveliness coincident with being movement-born.’⁴⁷ In fact the ‘special senses’, as the conventional five are known, are secondary to the primal sensing that allows the animate being to know that it is, and to engage with its world. In claiming movement as primary, Sheets-Johnstone is not setting up an opposition to the ‘primacy of perception’ articulated by Merleau-Ponty:

there is no question of a contest of any sort between movement and perception, and this for two reasons: creaturely movement is the very condition of all forms of creaturely perception; and creaturely movement, being itself a creature-perceived phenomenon, is in and of

⁴⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 218.

⁴⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 218.

itself a source of knowledge. [...] Not only is our own perception of the world everywhere and always animated, but our movement is everywhere and always kinesthetically informed.⁴⁸

Sheets-Johnstone argues for kinaesthesia, the sense of oneself moving, as the first and most fundamental sense. Through 'incipient intentionalities' arising from primal animation, 'we put ourselves together; we learn our bodies'.⁴⁹ As she points out, 'the first developing *perceptual system*, apparent soon after conception and dramatically apparent in the varied self-movement abilities of fetuses, is the somatosensory cortex.'⁵⁰ '[M]ovement and touch – not vision, smell, hearing, or taste – are primary in a neurologically developmental sense.'⁵¹ They are equally primary in evolutionary terms: it was through moving, and forming themselves as separate, contained entities, that the first unicellular organisms developed a primitive perception of touch that progressively evolved into increasingly specialised sensing⁵² (including the many specialised senses that non-human creatures, and vegetal life, possess that humans do not, such as echolocation, electroreception, chemoperception, and so on). And this primal animation is thus central to consciousness: we sense ourselves through movement, making the conscious being not so much *Dasein* as '*Da-bewegung*'.⁵³

It is through the mother's movement, and its own turning in the womb, that the foetus's vestibular system begins to develop a relationship with gravity that will continue to develop and shift over a lifetime of growth, bodily practice, illness or injury, and aging. It is through its own movement in contact with the fluid and walls of the amniotic sac that it builds proprioception as well as a sense of touch that supports the development of taste, smell and hearing. The infant learns his world, and his body, through movement, in an apprenticeship that brings him information about his situation and simultaneously draws him on a

⁴⁸ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 113.

⁴⁹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 218.

⁵⁰ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 228 (original emphasis).

⁵¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 515.

⁵² Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 59.

⁵³ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 218.

path of development that builds movement on movement. Reflex movements that are the first response to sensory stimulation (such as the rooting reflex which responds to touch around the mouth, turning the infant either towards sustenance that will satisfy his hunger, or away from what he does not need) form the foundation for a gradual expansion of increasingly complex movement capacity, through rolling over, pushing up, sitting, crawling and eventually standing and walking.⁵⁴ All of these movements are prompted by the ‘incipient intentionalities’ evoked by Sheets-Johnstone. Through these and many other movements the infant explores his own body and the world around him through all his senses, acquiring knowledge and experience. And throughout life, movement continues to be central to learning, to vitality, and to engagement with the world. ‘We literally discover ourselves in movement. We grow kinetically into our bodies. In particular, we grow into those distinctive ways of moving that come with our being the bodies we are.’⁵⁵ And this ‘apprenticeship we all serve in becoming the bodies we are’⁵⁶ is lifelong: as our bodies alter and adapt over time through growth, training, habit, illness or injury and aging. Rather than ‘the bodies we are’, we might better speak of the ‘bodies we are ever becoming’. We continue to learn and relearn them – often, even as adults, unaware of the process; it may be only in retrospect that I realise how I have adjusted my gait over time to accommodate a chronic hip injury, or notice a practised ease in negotiating a narrow doorway I have become familiar with.

As Tim Ingold points out, ‘perception is fundamentally about *movement*.’⁵⁷ Without movement, sensory information becomes mute or inaccessible. Though in my adult body my sense-world may feel familiar and unchanging, I still need to move to grasp it, and to become aware of my own being-present. I

⁵⁴ Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering* (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2003), pp. 122-156; Hartley, *Wisdom*, p. 54; Catherine Burns, ‘The active role of the baby in birthing’, in *Exploring Body-Mind Centering: An Anthology of Experience and Method*, ed. Gill Wright Miller, Pat Ethridge and Kate Tarlow Morgan (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2011), pp. 21-40 (pp. 23-25).

⁵⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 117 (original emphasis).

⁵⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 210.

⁵⁷ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 11.

may have an abstract awareness of my knee, my throat, my shoulders, may know what they look like or have a conception of their anatomy, but it is only when I straighten my leg, swallow or breathe deeply to relax that they become fully physically present through my felt sense of them. The hardness or softness of the seat of my chair is clear to me in the moment I sit down but becomes inapparent if I stay in one position for some time, only to re-emerge when I move. An object seen in my peripheral vision remains a vague shape, unless it moves and attracts my attention, or I shift my gaze in its direction. But equally, an object in front of my eyes can become an abstract flat surface if my eyes remain still for long enough. It is the movement of my gaze over the surface of the desk in front of me that allows me to perceive its softly matt plastic surrounded by harder, smoother wood – a perception that in itself is only possible because I have previously learned such surfaces through a combination of shifting gaze and roving touch. Merleau-Ponty suggests that no conceptualisation is required in order to engage in this sensory relationship: ‘to move one’s body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made independently of any representation.’⁵⁸ The baby begins to imitate the movement of others before it forms a sense of its own body as entity, engaging an ‘internal relationship’ between its body experienced from the inside and that of the other seen from the outside.⁵⁹

Sheets-Johnstone grounds her argument for the ‘primacy of movement’ in basic facts of biology, drawing on the evolutionary biology of microorganisms, the palaeoanthropology of early hominids, neurophysiology and neuropsychology, to posit movement as originary. Life, she argues, *is* animation: stillborn infants are, precisely, *stillborn*.⁶⁰ She examines critically a range of philosophical approaches to the subject, from Aristotle to Daniel Dennett, which all, she argues, omit, elide or ignore the crucial fact of consciousness – that it arises in, and is only experienced through, a moving body. She consistently returns to this centrality of the animate to any consideration of ‘mind’, ‘consciousness’ or

⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. 161-162.

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 410.

⁶⁰ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 200, p. 504.

‘embodiment’, the ‘basic reality of animation that defines the organism as a whole and that, in defining the *whole organism*, is the conceptual portal to understanding the dynamics of experience from top to bottom and bottom to top’.⁶¹ At the same time, she resolutely debunks the claims of cognitive neuroscience to explain experience, pointing out that ‘a brain’ does not by itself perceive anything: ‘it is intact living individuals who experience, not brains any more than livers or cochlea.’⁶² And while her argument is informed by the observations of evolutionary biology and neuroscience, it is grounded in a phenomenological analysis of lived experience: we only know because we are moving bodies. It is not brains that ‘know’, she contends, it is bodies (of all kinds) in movement that perceive, and build knowledge through moving perception:

creaturely movement is the very condition of all forms of creaturely perception; and creaturely movement, being itself a creature-perceived phenomenon, is in and of itself a source of knowledge. [...] Animation is the originating ground of knowledge.⁶³

In the development of her analysis Sheets-Johnstone addresses affectivity as a feature of animation, central to the animate being’s experience of and response to the world, with affects perceived as ‘bodily-felt spatio-temporal-energetic experiences’ that resist attempts to codify them or explain them in neurophysiological terms. She goes on to consider ‘thinking in movement’,⁶⁴ using the paradigm of dance improvisation as a model for ‘thinking in movement as a way of being in the world, of wondering or exploring the world directly, taking it up moment by moment and living it in movement, kinetically.’⁶⁵ As for Serres, for Sheets-Johnstone knowledge begins in the body’s engagement with the world in which it is enmeshed. In Chapter 3, where I take up this movement-based improvisation with the world, I relate it

⁶¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 458 (original emphasis).

⁶² Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 473, fn. 8.

⁶³ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 113.

⁶⁴ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, pp. 419-449.

⁶⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 425.

also to Tim Ingold's reflections on the practice of the artisan, and more broadly to the lived experience of being-in-the-world. Sheets-Johnstone's evocation of wonder and curiosity here extends her argument that wonder, as an embodied relationship with the world, is the primal motivation for philosophy, which is itself a practice of wondering, a 'timeless, passionate labor of love on behalf of wisdom'.⁶⁶ But philosophy is itself only a special instance of the wonder/ing that consistently, persistently arises from a present-moment engagement with embodied being in the world. As noted above, the theme of wonder recurs throughout this thesis, and I return to address it directly in my conclusion.

Movement is also what gives us a sense of time. For Merleau-Ponty, the subject is quintessentially temporal: one cannot stand outside time. In her 'field of presence' the subject always already *has* time, a past and a future not posited as discrete events that must be repeatedly remembered or projected in consciousness, but as an 'incontestable acquisition.'⁶⁷ Sheets-Johnstone suggests that the very notion of time arises from self-movement, positing 'that our sense of *time itself*, as distinguished from our awareness of *something in time*, is [...] epistemologically generated in primordial self-movement. The felt sense of the dynamics of movement – the distinctions between terms such as 'swift, sudden, sustained, slow [...]'⁶⁸ are qualitative perceptions that emerge from a kinaesthetic awareness of variations in the quality of our own movement. Paradoxically, the movement that allows us to sense ourselves and our world, that gives us a sense of being here, does so only because *through* movement the 'hereness' and 'nowness' of this moment is already passing. Performance, harnessing time as its core medium, and rooted in the living, moving bodies of performer and perceiver, is inherently grounded in movement, and hence has a particular capacity to pull attention into the passing present moment. I consider the mutual implication of time, matter, body and movement, and their articulation in performance, in detail in Chapters 2 and 3, and in so doing reveal wonder not as a response to a

⁶⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 295.

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. 483, 486.

⁶⁸ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 134.

spectacle laid out before me, but as an ever-unfolding sensory aliveness to the shifting enmeshment of body and world.

Material being: Self/other/world

What Sheets-Johnstone and Serres point to is a living of body not as the discrete, contained object it is conventionally perceived as in Western philosophy, science, and in the everyday practice of life in the West (conditioned as we are by social convention and education to regard and experience ourselves as individuals), but as continuous, even co-terminous, with other bodies. We may be particularly aware of, or subconsciously responsive to, these connections with other humans, through somatosensory responses to witnessing others' experience of touch,⁶⁹ motor cortex stimulation as we see others move,⁷⁰ and social reading of gesture and movement, but it is not just other humans, or even other mammals, that we share this material continuity with. We are porous beings, a material existence experienced as individual but indivisibly part of a continuum of material existence of animate and non-animate being (though again this distinction draws a boundary that derives from human categorisation rather than a demarcation that can be specifically defined). As Timothy Morton puts it, '[the] surfaces of living beings are envelopes and filters, thick regions where complex chemical transfers and reactions take place. [...] The more we know, the less self-contained living beings become.'⁷¹ In my consideration of the performances that form my central case studies in the chapters that follow, I take up this approach to the relationship between self and world. Looking at one-to-one performance, durational performance that centres on breath, and at performance that engages the interface between body and material, I explore how a

⁶⁹ See e.g. Nadia Bolognini et al., 'Sharing social touch in the primary somatosensory cortex', *Current Biology* 24.13 (2014): 1513-1517; Michael Shaefer, Hans-Jochen Heinze, Michael Rotte and 'Embodied empathy for tactile events: Interindividual differences and vicarious somatosensory responses during touch observation', *NeuroImage* 60(2) (2012): 952-957.

⁷⁰ J.M. Kilner and R.M. Lemon, 'What we currently know about mirror neurons', *Current Biology* 23 (2013): R1057-R1062.

⁷¹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 36.

phenomenological engagement with substance and subjective experience may be articulated with more theoretical considerations of the relationship with the other. This exploration is informed by the thinking of Emmanuel Lévinas, and by Tim Ingold's anthropological approach to Deleuze and Guattari, in their various accounts of the relationship with the 'other' and the 'world', but developed further in relation to Luce Irigaray's fleshly understanding of the relationship between bodied beings. While Lévinas is centrally concerned with the ethical relationship with the (implicitly human) other, arguing for a radical openness based on a responsibility toward the other that precedes the subject's own freedom, Irigaray goes beyond intersubjectivity, the distinction between outside and inside, to engage the fleshly relationship between bodied beings, and between bodied being and world, challenging both the assumption of the sealed subject and the taken-for-granted 'givenness' of the world. She takes up Merleau-Ponty's image of the 'chiasmus' or fleshly 'intertwining' of vision, suggesting that his argument misses its central point: while his example of one hand touching the other can never be free of the subject/object binary (one hand will always be experienced as the one touching, the other as the one touched), his metaphor of the meeting between perceiver and world as a joining of two lips points to a less dichotomous interrelation. Returning to touch as the primary sense, first engaged in the 'tangible invisible' of the uterine environment,⁷² Irigaray posits not a subject-object, or even subject-other, relationship, but an interface of indeterminacy. As Cathryn Vasseleu puts it: 'the tangible invisible describes the body as a subjectless, objectless difference in the flesh [...] The tangible invisible is the body as a positive reserve, a vitally constituted dimension, an adherence to indetermination rather than the surfacing of an unrepresentable interior.'⁷³ Crucially, Irigaray locates the roots of relationship not in the distanced perception of vision, but in the nearness of touch, an encounter that precedes objectification. Indeed, vision itself is only possible *through* the touch of the habitually forgotten medium of light: 'the gaze [...] is received from and in the flesh [...] I see only

⁷² Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 152.

⁷³ Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 67.

by the touch of light, and [...] my eyes are located in my body.⁷⁴ And vision cannot perceive the medium of touch:

I never see that *in which* I touch or am touched. What is at play in the caress cannot be seen. The inbetween, the middle, the *medium* of the caress cannot be seen. Likewise, and differently, I do not see that which allows me to see, that which touches me with light and air so that I can see some 'thing'.⁷⁵

This evocation of a medium that touches echoes Irigaray's challenge to Heidegger in his 'forgetting of the air': as she argues in *L'oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger*,⁷⁶ positioning Dasein's engagement with the world in a 'clearing', as Heidegger does, is to miss the point that all experience is mediated by the supporting medium of the air that is our primary engagement with the world. In her account of the relationship between bodies, Irigaray turns her focus to mucus as medium, an ungraspable indeterminacy that refuses once again the distinction between subject and object; it is this carnal mucus, she suggests, that Merleau-Ponty fails to acknowledge in his account of vision, meaning that he is unable to overcome the division between perceiver and perceived. This analysis, together with Irigaray's reflection on wonder, point to a bodily attentive approach to the world that engages a material ethics of relationship; I take up her thinking in Chapter 1, on one-to-one performance, and in Chapter 2, on breath and air, and return to it in my final chapter on wonder.

Flows of becoming

Irigaray's reflection on the materiality of relationship focuses particularly on aspects of the feminine that are habitually forgotten in accounts of being in the world, arguing that air and light perform the role of supportive medium

⁷⁴ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 155.

⁷⁵ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 152 (original emphasis).

⁷⁶ Luce Irigaray, *L'oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983).

(literally, matrix) that was taken by the womb before birth, and that in the intimacy of touch (as in the womb) flesh is not distinguishable from flesh. In maintaining this material relationality with the world, she points once again to the bodily enmeshment argued by Serres, and reveals the illusory nature of the self-contained subject. In their deconstruction of materiality, Deleuze and Guattari unmoor being from the contained subject and the closed body: what exists are 'lines of flight' and 'haecceities'.

A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills. On the plane of consistency, *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude*: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds.⁷⁷

Anthropologist-philosopher Tim Ingold takes up this argument but grounds it firmly in observations from field anthropology and everyday life, in his account of how we be, and become, in our world. Drawing both on the insights of anthropology and on phenomenological analysis of experiences of making and journeying, his wide-ranging essays consider ways we engage with objects, materials, intentions and practices. Repeatedly returning to the contingency of all our engagement with our body/world, he posits living as a process of 'wayfinding', akin to Serres' sensory 'navigation' of the world.⁷⁸ His references to cultures and practices geographically remote and often very different from those of the contemporary West are offered not as examples of 'purer' or 'more authentic' ways of living but as models or parallels for the ways we all make our way through life and the world. In his more recent work in particular, these

⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), p. 260.

⁷⁸ However, for Ingold 'navigation', following pre-drawn maps, is the antithesis of the improvisatory journeying that finds its way as it goes. Tim Ingold, *Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 219-242.

are accompanied by accounts of personal experience and simple practical experiments the reader is exhorted to try for herself, reimmersing the reading body in a shifting material world. In this thesis, I draw particularly on Ingold's collections of essays *Perception of the Environment*, *Being Alive* and *Making*, in which he pursues his exploration of living as journey and process.⁷⁹ Centrally, Ingold argues that being in the world is a matter not so much of individuals existing opposite objects or, as Heidegger would have it, 'dwelling' in the world, but rather of a multitude of becomings in a flow of materials:

Like all other creatures, human beings do not exist on the 'other side' of materiality, but swim in an ocean of materials. [...] The forms of things, far from having been imposed from without upon an inert substrate, arise and are borne along – as indeed we are too – within this current of materials.⁸⁰

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Ingold posits existence not as a network in which individual beings exist as nodes connected by various kinds of relationship, but rather as a 'meshwork' of flows or lines of energy in which 'instead of thinking of organisms as entangled in relations, we should regard every living thing as itself an entanglement.'⁸¹ Reflecting on craft and making practices from basket-making to writing to kite-flying, he suggests that in all our wayfinding through life we are constantly improvising with and through the materials involved (including the material of our own bodies), rather than following pre-mapped paths of knowledge: 'people know *by way* of their practice [...] through an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment.'⁸² 'Knowing *is* movement,'⁸³ argues Ingold, and I draw on his accounts of practices of material improvisation alongside Sheets-Johnstone's considerations of knowing *in* movement in

⁷⁹ Ingold, *Perception; Being Alive; Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁸⁰ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 24.

⁸¹ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 87.

⁸² Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 159 (original emphasis).

⁸³ Ingold, *Making*, p. 1 (original emphasis).

Chapter 3, where I reflect on matter, and the knowing material body, in movement.

Attention in practice

While sensing and movement are crucial to our sense of ourselves in a world, in a present, this 'felt sense' is commonly the latent ground of more salient experiences to which we turn our attention. In order to know our own presence, our attention has to be focused towards it; it otherwise remains part of the 'ready-to-hand', there without requiring attention. As Daniel Stern puts it: 'The present moment is a subjective, psychological, process unit of which one is aware.'⁸⁴ For one's own presence to become part of that awareness, it has to become present-at-hand. Attention to one's own presentness may be invoked involuntarily, through physical discomfort or pain (my leg has become numb through sitting in the same position for too long, or is suddenly burned when I drop hot tea on it), alarm (the moment of falling forward as I stumble over a raised paving stone), or physical pleasure (as I stand waiting for a bus, the sun comes out and radiates warmth between my shoulder blades). It may also occur intersubjectively, through the awareness of being the object of another's attention, a form of 'social dys-appearance', as Leder puts it.⁸⁵ In performance, this kind of consciousness can lead to an excess of presence for the spectator, as suggested by Nick Ridout.⁸⁶ But there are also modes of attention that can allow the 'felt sense' of being present to come to the fore, and which I argue can be manifested, harnessed or invited in performance. These modes call for a degree of intentionality, of focused awareness, but not necessarily a focus on the subject herself.

The practices on which I draw in my own work have in common an engagement of attention to the phenomenal experience of the present moment,

⁸⁴ Stern, p. 25 (my emphasis).

⁸⁵ Leder, p. 96.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 70-95.

bringing a detached witnessing to the experience of being-here-now in terms of sensation, affect and thought, and the moment-by-moment changes in the physical, affective, imaginative and intellectual qualities of this experience. Basic meditation practices, for example, advocate a focus on the breath, following it through its ebb and flow, noticing the distractions of thought and persistently, gently returning attention to the movement of air from outside to inside and back again. Authentic Movement invites a self-witnessing (and secondarily, an external witnessing) of the physical sensations, emotions and images arising from spontaneously improvised movement. Body Weather hones sensory perception, with particular attention to awareness of body in environment, through exercises that develop specificity in sensing and moving in order to arrive at a precision of movement, and an intensity of engagement with each successive immediate moment, in performance. Body-Mind Centering 'works specifically with the dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious processes through the cells, tissues, and organs of the body', with the aim of achieving 'a dynamic, alert and fluid quality of mind by which we can adapt moment to moment to our internal and external environment'.⁸⁷ In each of these practices, there is thus an awareness of both the multidimensional intensity of the instantaneous moment and its contingency, its immediate disappearance.

Another key element of these practices is a focus on movement, a sensory attention to a *moving* body. Even in the apparent stillness of sitting meditation, the simple attention to breathing not only engages with one of the most basic movements of life, but also invites the meditator to become aware of the subtle differences between each breath, the constant shifts of sensation through her body, and ultimately, to contemplate the impermanence of all being and the inevitability of change. Consciousness itself becomes not a fixed entity but a contingency, as the meditator begins to develop an insight into the 'moment to

⁸⁷ Linda Hartley, *Somatic Psychology: Body, Mind and Meaning* (London: Whurr Publishers, 2004), pp. 16, 173.

moment *arising* of mind'.⁸⁸ Attention to the body and to sensing inevitably brings a focus to movement, for a living body is a moving body.

This practice of sensory attention is more than just an exercise for the purpose of quieting the mind, resolving trauma, refining performance quality or even working towards enlightenment; it is also a return to the root of knowing, and to how we know that we are. All of my information about my world and my self comes through my senses, whether it be the sharp pain that tells me my shin has encountered a solid object, the startled leap of my heart as an ambulance siren starts up close behind me, or a complex idea absorbed through visual engagement with the physical manifestation of text on paper before it can be abstracted in thought. Even at this level, abstract thought requires not only a brain supported and nourished by a system of organs that breathe, feed, digest and eliminate, but also, as Sheets-Johnstone shows, an awareness of self-movement: consciousness, she says, is 'fundamentally a corporeal phenomenon [...] a dimension of living forms, in particular, a dimension of living forms that move.'⁸⁹ Body-based knowing has been the foundation of our sense of self and world since our earliest existence, both individually and in evolutionary terms. Before we imagine, speculate, philosophise or argue, we are always already here, and knowing ourselves to be so.

These are, of course, privileged moments: to be constantly attending to every sensory perception would mean being immobilised by a cacophony of which we could make no sense at all. The process of embryological and infant development involves integrating these perceptions so that we are able to absorb them while devoting attention to phenomena that require intentional focus. Even the exercise of attending to particular aspects of sensing (breath, the position of an arm, peripheral vision) requires that we elide other elements of sensory experience, though practice can help to develop a more global awareness.

⁸⁸ Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 61 (my emphasis).

⁸⁹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 53.

The practice of attention to these simple aspects of bodily being re-places the subject in her own present, bodied moment, centring her in a place and time. And it is important to note that they are *practices*: while the involuntary attention excited by a sudden realisation of physical sensation is direct and immediate, the light, holding awareness of *how I am being in this now* is honed through persistent iteration of the practice of attention. My argument in this thesis will be nevertheless that there are modes of performance, but also particular ways of paying attention, that can offer such privileged moments and invite the awareness of not only a being-here-now, but a being-together-with, or rather, a being-as-one.

While the discussion above has addressed the moving, sensing subject in relation to a moving, sensory world, the encounter with another consciousness invites a special mode of attention and sense-making. Performance by its very nature involves this encounter, for both performer and spectator, but the experience of witnessing, or participating in, performance is still phenomenal at root. Sensing oneself in the presence of another partakes in all the rich layering of the ‘felt sense’ of presentness: beyond the basic data of visual and/or auditory apprehension of the other’s presence in proximity, there is an immediate, largely unconscious, sense of self in relationship that emerges from an intricate weave of physical vibrations and resonances (heart rhythms, pheromones,⁹⁰ neuronal ‘mirror’ responses), the affective accumulation of personal and relational history, and external circumstance. Before the emergence of the language that habitually frames intersubjective experience, we share a bodily enmeshment in the world and one another. ‘Our social lives are [...] rooted in a dynamic intercorporeality that is kinesthetically and affectively resonant through and through.’⁹¹ This enmeshment is further layered with what Jon Foley Sherman calls ‘the configuration of responsibility between

⁹⁰ Rollin McCraty, ‘The energetic heart: Biomagnetic communication within and between people’, in Paul J. Rosch, ed. *Bioelectromagnetic and Subtle Energy Medicine*, second edn (Boca Raton, CRC Press, 2015), pp. 125-140;

⁹¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 515.

others and myself'.⁹² I consider the relationship with the (human) other in depth in Chapter 1, on one-to-one performance.

Attending to performance

Towards the end of Cool and Balducci's performance Untitled (Prayers) 1996-2005, after an hour or so spent witnessing a series of short actions, all performed by Marie Cool with the same quiet, inexpressive deliberation, I watch guest performer Pierpaolo Calzolari press his forefinger into a pile of breadcrumbs, lift it back up and regard, quietly, as single crumbs begin every so often to fall back to the table he is sitting at. As the attention of the room reaches toward this small focus, I sense myself inhabiting the tension between stickiness and gravity, fully engaged in watching, in paying attention with Calzolari (and the other spectators, whose quietness contributes to the intense focus on the gesture); I rest back into the time it takes for the event to come to pass. In this gentle space of witnessing I am also aware of the depth of silence in the room, the sensation of my own breathing (the tendency to hold it in this moment of intent concentration), and of striving to catch the sound of the crumbs falling on the table. And as I engage with this subtle sense-time, I am also making sense of the performance – not by accounting for it analytically, but in the deep, restful satisfaction I enjoy as I settle back into the time of each crumb falling, the quiet attention generated by the collective focus – the feeling of grounded aliveness that comes with this attention in the moment is how the performance, the other spectators and I, together, make sense.⁹³

⁹² Jon Foley Sherman, *A Strange Proximity: Stage Presence, Failure, and the Ethics of Attention* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.6.

⁹³ Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled (Prayers) 1996-2005*, South London Gallery, March 2005. See <<http://southlondongallery.org/page/untitled-prayers-1996-2005>> [accessed 1 July 2017]. I return to Cool and Balducci's work in further discussion of the work of attending to the material world in chapter 3.

Paying attention draws attention. The skilled performer, like the skilled craftsperson or athlete, holds our focus by virtue of her own attention to her being and doing in the moment. It is not only the delicate precision and quiet intensity of the action I am currently witnessing Calzolari perform, but the committed concentration of both performers throughout the previous hour that have held my attention throughout. Watching a practised improviser like Andrea Buckley⁹⁴ or Kirstie Simson⁹⁵ dancing, my attention is drawn and sustained not only by my delight in the fine articulation and flow of their movement, but by their own concentration on it in each successive moment, their following of the intriguing path of embodied discovery that they share with me and other spectators. The act of performing itself, by virtue of the performer's attention to it, draws attention in a way the same action, accomplished without the intention of revealing itself as performance, does not.

Attention, then, is at the crux of performance. As Foley Sherman suggests, performance by its very nature depends on attention, existing not 'before attendants so much as through them; performance comes to being through their different kinds of attention.'⁹⁶ This attention may not always be that desired by those presenting the performance: the physical presence of 'attendants' does not guarantee that they will focus in the direction solicited, particularly, as Foley Sherman goes on to note, when various types of 'failure' come into play. Equally, a lack of attention on the part of the performer may result in the spectator's attention falling away; or the spectator's lack of attention may cause the performer to lose her footing, become unmoored in this relationship of attention. But these moments in themselves are part of the living of performance: as I notice my distraction and return my attention to a performance that I have drifted away from, the return brings me to myself in

⁹⁴ See e.g. Siobhan Davies Dance, *material/rearranged/to/ be*, Barbican Centre, 20-28 January 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0l-s3PdVQc4>> [accessed 29 November 2017]; Buckley dances between two screens while other dancers perform to their own improvisation scores.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Goat, 'Force of Nature trailer', <<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/forceofnature>> [accessed 21 July 2017]; Spacecraft Project, 'Kirstie Simson', <<https://spacecraftproject.wordpress.com/kirstiesimson/>> [accessed 21 July 2017].

⁹⁶ Foley Sherman, p. 12. 'Attendant' is Foley Sherman's term for 'someone at a performance not formally recognized as a performer' (p. 24).

my present moment. The case studies in the following chapters, drawn from the practice of a number of artists as well as my own, point to ways in which performance is able to invite attention to a shared present moment of being.

A note on wonder

The notion of wonder recurs throughout this thesis, emerging in accounts of experience and also as a vital concern of my key theorists. As such it is defined in various ways, from delight at the unlooked-for arrival of 'rightness' in a fleeting performance moment to engaged curiosity that drives further exploration. But the everyday wonder I address here as an always available potential of the performance moment is not awe in the face of the sublime, with which wonder is conventionally conflated. As defined by Edmund Burke, and later widely taken up by Romanticism, 'the passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature* [...] is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.'⁹⁷ Traditionally evoked by contemplation of the vast power of nature, the sublime removes the capacity for action and expression, and can only be reflected on at some remove, 'in tranquillity'. Wonder, on the other hand, as I employ the term in this thesis, is cognate with Heidegger's *Erstaunen* at what is most usual,⁹⁸ what Mary-Jane Rubenstein calls 'a certain shock or terror [that] recoils at the sudden impossibility of the everyday, while awe goes on to marvel that the impossible nonetheless *is*.'⁹⁹ As Tallis suggests, it is everywhere and at every moment available, and may be aroused as easily by a reflection in a puddle as by the grandest vista. Moreover wonder in the everyday moment, while it may be momentarily arresting, is not incapacitating: like any 'present moment' it is a dynamic experience, and one that draws the subject on to

⁹⁷ Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 1 (Project Gutenberg: 2005). Available at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#PART_I [accessed 6 August 2018].

⁹⁸ Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 32-39.

⁹⁹ Rubenstein, p. 23.

further exploration. It is in fact, as Irigaray argues, ‘the motive impulse in all its dimensions. From its most vegetative to its most sublime functions, the living being needs wonder in order to move.’¹⁰⁰ More than just the stimulus to questioning and knowing, wonder underpins our primal survival instincts, providing the condition for the movement that, in Sheets-Johnstone’s terms, *is* life. The wonder evoked in this thesis takes form on various levels, from momentary astonishment to open curiosity to the acknowledgement of grace, but arises always from the shifting contingency of moment-to-moment being. It is grounded in a fully present embodied being that by virtue of its aliveness is open to the unknown, as Irigaray suggests: ‘[c]ommitment to the future, to its virgin nature, its driving force, without letting go of the support of its corporeal rootedness.’¹⁰¹ This in itself is an ethical attitude, allowing the other, the unknown, to be and unfold as it is rather than containing it within physical boundaries or theoretical definitions. As Tallis, Irigaray and Sheets-Johnstone variously point out, it requires both a commitment of time and attention and an openness to the risk of disorientation. The wonder that performance has the power to generate is considered in relation to case studies throughout this thesis, and I explore the experience in more depth in my conclusion.

Methodology

Serres, Sheets-Johnstone, Irigaray and Ingold are also central to the theoretical fabric of this thesis in that each offers practical and analytical examples of method which I draw on in my own methodology. Centrally concerned with questions of language and knowledge, Serres presents a descriptive phenomenology that generates a reflection, and an often lyrical language, rooted in fleshly being, privileging the knowledge gained through the body over the rote-learning of the academy and the empty debates of abstract philosophy. His method is not only to ground his argument in accounts of sensory experience, but to make it in a sensorially rich language that engages

¹⁰⁰ Irigaray *Éthique*, p. 76.

¹⁰¹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 85.

the reader in her own sensory appreciation of the text, a combination of echoing sense impressions stimulated by vivid, poetic descriptions and images, a rich tasting of the text itself, in all its vigorous materiality, and a continual return to her own sensing in the present moment. Sensing, Serres suggests, can only truly be thought and expressed through the sensory modality of example and metaphor, and he refuses to distance the articulation of experience from the material being it is grounded in, thereby creating a performative text that repeatedly acts on the reader's own senses. At the same time as expounding a philosophical argument, his sensorially rich, highly crafted text implicitly manifests an embodied analytical methodology that points towards a detailed multisensorial phenomenology as a key tool for thinking about performance. Serres' work thus also operates as an exposition of practice, a performative writing that brings into being the sensory experience he articulates, and as such resonates with the practice-thinking that informs and grounds this thesis. Sheets-Johnstone's empirically grounded phenomenology draws extensively on scientific and philosophical sources but is rooted in the evidence of lived experience. While her rigorously empirical approach is very different from Serres' poetic and personal exploration, her method is equally rooted in the phenomenal, the body's own sense of itself moving in a moving world. For Sheets-Johnstone too, a phenomenological approach is the one that can best make sense of the knowledge of self and world that arises through animation – the kind of consciousness that enables us to feel present in a given moment and place. Stanton Garner makes a compelling argument for phenomenology as a method of analysing performance:

Reclaiming experience and subjectivity for theory, as phenomenology has the potential of doing, offers both a return of these categories (the cornerstones of givenness) to the theoretical field and an articulation of variability and its structures, in the absence of which difference is literally unthinkable.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), p. 13.

I follow Garner's proposal in my phenomenological examination of the particular experience of presentness in this thesis, harnessing the '[phenomenological] version of Clifford Geertz's "thick description" – a description, in this case, designed to reembody the fields that we inhabit and perceive, to reclaim such experiential "stuff," forgotten and disowned, as even theory is made on.'¹⁰³ In Chapter 1 I consider further the potential of subjective experiential accounts as a basis for research in performance. On the broader philosophical level, Irigaray's discursive process of open-ended speculation suggests avenues of further exploration, allowing thinking to be an ongoing, living process rather than pinning down answers, while Ingold's phenomenological anthropology consistently returns to practice as the ground of thinking, knowing, and ultimately, being-in-the-world.

These four key thinkers emerge from very different disciplinary backgrounds, and rarely engage with one another. I draw in depth on their arguments, as well as reflections from a range of other theorists, because I believe each sheds a crucial, and complementary, light on aspects of the complex experience of being present. In interweaving non-commensurate arguments from different fields, I seek not to confront them or bring them all to a single point, a 'universal' definition of presentness, but rather to suggest that their various threads may flow in dialogue with one another. Gemma Corradi Fiumara suggests that 'argument' is too often couched, and understood, in terms of conflict, and proposes that rather than thinking of argument (or even analysis of a question) in terms of victory or defeat, we might more fruitfully see the process of advancing thinking in the more collaborative terms of 'gardening or choreography'.¹⁰⁴ It is in this spirit that I bring together insights from these disparate thinkers, and that I locate them at various points along my own line of argument. My contention is that they speak to one another through the central notion of presentness examined here, and that my key case studies illuminate aspects of this experience that are further opened up by the work of

¹⁰³ Garner, p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, trans. by C. Lambert (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 153.

these scholars. Corradi Fiumara's proposition that listening offers the most fertile ground for constructive reflection and analysis chimes with this endeavour, and with my performance practice as a whole. Rather than dismissing Phelan's and Schneider's considerations of presence and absence in the special case of performance, I suggest that they open up a space of reflection into which these various strands of thinking can flow, to build a more nuanced, complex and moving (alive/animated) understanding of presentness and the particular presentness of performance. In weaving together these different strands of thinking, through the lived experience of performance as spectator and performer, my aim is to suggest not only that performance acts as a privileged space for the participant to engage the experience of presentness, but that by virtue of its very ephemerality, its ever-vanishing present moment, performance articulates what presentness *is*, calling attention to our moment-by-moment-altering being-in-the-world, in a way that, if we fully engage with it, can only invite wonder.

Voice

A specific choice is made throughout to use the first-person voice not only to recount my experience of the case studies I focus on, but also in much of my reflection on the experience of being present, on knowing and thinking. On the most basic level this choice is a pragmatic one: my case studies are of performances that I witnessed and that sparked a particular interest in relation to my own concerns in practice, and my responses speak to that interest and those concerns. In the case of the one-to-one performances I discuss in Chapter 1 in particular, it can also be seen as an ethical position, given that each participant's encounter with the work is by definition unique. Secondly, the choice of the first-person voice underscores the phenomenological approach I have taken, articulating my argument clearly as founded on empirical experience, and adopting for myself the method I propose in Chapter 1. Thirdly, the first-person voice can serve as a reminder that the sense of being

'present' is firmly rooted in subjective experience. If, as I argue in this thesis, performance can create a space where the spectator/participant is invited and encouraged to engage with her own presentness, this sense will emerge at least on some level in an awareness of her unique subjecthood, whether through engagement with her own bodily being, intersubjective engagement, or some kind of agency. Fourthly, the first-person account can paradoxically prove less distancing than third-person narrative, inviting the reader into a more direct engagement with the experience recounted, as Michel Serres' extensive descriptions of his own sensory experience vividly demonstrate. My hope is that my first-person accounts of bodily-affective-intellectual experience within and outside of performance will invite a resonance in the reader, once again emphasising the complex interweaving of body, affect and intellect integral to reflection not only on physical-material experience, but also on the most abstract ideas. Critical accounts of 'spectator experience' are often generalised in a sort of auditorial omnipresence that tends to obscure individual experience and to elide the real, relational space of performance; my first-person approach is therefore not only a pragmatic but an ethical choice. In order to aid readerliness, these experiential accounts are inset in italics to distinguish them from the argument that threads through and draws from them.

Chapter outline

My three main chapters approach three different aspects of the experience of being present in performance. Chapter 1 considers intersubjective presence through the lens of one-to-one performance, focusing on work by Michael Pinchbeck, Jess Dobkin and Rotozaza. My choice to reflect on three examples rather than a single case study is part of a deliberate attempt to develop a phenomenological methodology for analysis of this form, in response to the subjectivity of the spectator experience which can prove problematic to conventional critical analysis. These case studies form the basis for reflections on the experience of being present to another, which draw in depth on the

thinking of Irigaray. I take up Irigaray's analysis particularly in response to Lévinas, an important theorist of the ethics of relationship between subjectivities. On the basis of my own experience as participant and as performer, and the recounted experiences of others, I argue that the 'intimate' engagement regularly claimed for this form may prove for the spectator be with her own self rather than with the other/performer, and may thus enhance her sense of her own self-presence. My last case study, articulated with Irigaray's account of the medium of relationship, points to how performance can act as a key site of interrogation of the ethics of the relationship with the other in the world.

Chapter 2 uses a single case study, a durational performance by Jordan McKenzie, to address the experience of bodily being and process, and how a sense of bodily temporality and finality can be articulated with and through the present moment of performance. Here I draw further on the work of Irigaray to illuminate the fluid engagement with the world that underpins the experience of presentness in time, in a body that, as Serres suggests, simultaneously folds in on itself and opens to the world. I suggest that by articulating the basic bodily function of breathing in complex ways, the performance invites the spectator into an awareness of simple, fundamental aspects of her physical being such as breathing and standing, as well as her physical/material involvement with others in the performance space, and hence her ethical responsibility towards the other beings of the world.

Chapter 3 returns to the experience of bodied temporality, but articulates it with memory, bodily praxis/practice, and material knowing, in relation to a case study of a durational performance/installation by Clare Twomey. In this chapter I draw especially on Tim Ingold's analysis of the processual nature and the mutual intertwining of material being and material world. I posit that work that engages performatively with matter and materials brings to the fore the performers', and spectators', material engagement in a material world. Returning to Sheets-Johnstone's argument for a consciousness rooted in the moving body, I reflect on movement as a process of material thinking, and

suggest that it is at this knowing-body level that we understand the liveness of the performance moment, and come into a sense of presentness with it.

Two interludes reflect in more depth on my engagement in my practice with the concerns at the centre of this thesis, offering brief accounts of my journey with two forms of performance. The case studies in the three main chapters parallel my own practice in various respects. It is my ongoing engagement in one-to-one performance, which I consider in more detail in the first interlude, that leads me, in Chapter 1, to consider my experience of the form as a spectator/participant, and to reflect more generally on what it might offer in terms of an experience of being present-with. The artists whose work I reflect on all themselves have a substantial practice of one-to-one and/or interactive performance that is evident in their rigorous and thoughtful approach to this work. The durational performances of Jordan McKenzie (the central focus of Chapter 2, which reflects on breath/air) and Clare Twomey (analysed in Chapter 3, on matter/moving body) reflect my core interest in the relationship between my body and the material world, my own body as material, and body as material memory. The second interlude addresses my engagement with these themes in my durational performance practice more directly. These works also resonate with my continued return to repetition in performance,¹⁰⁵ and my abiding concern with the shared embodiment of the performance relationship.

In my conclusion I return to focus on the experience of wonder, drawing together the ideas of my four key theorists and arguing that the open-ended presentness offered by performance is indeed an opening to the complex wondering evoked in various ways by Sheets-Johnstone, Irigaray and Ingold.

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¹⁰⁵ See Rachel Gomme, 'Repetition compulsion: How I learned to love doing it again', *Performance Research* 20.5 (2015): 10-11.

Why should any of this matter? What difference does it make to 'feel present' in body in place in time? Firstly, I take this approach because it is the place from where I make work. My practice emerges out of movement: when I first started making performance it was from the perspective of dance, and the moving body (my own, that of participants and/or spectators) remains the root of my concerns in practice. My practice-thinking is fundamentally grounded in the bodily materiality that is my first and only way of knowing the world, at once uniquely individual (in terms of both physical constitution and experiential 'sediment') and shared with all the beings and matter of my world. I cannot think my practice without first being in its body.

Secondly, I want to suggest that the sense of being present in the moment can momentarily lift an alienation from bodily being and restore a sense of agency that is frequently lost in the contemporary world. Becoming present to oneself and the world can offer a sense of wholeness that reintegrates the subject, however difficult her situation may be. The invitation to 'mindfulness' in meditation practices is not primarily to relieve stress, as it is currently popularly applied, but to know the world (including all aspects of my being) as it really is, in its radical ephemerality. The invitation to presentness is therefore already an ethical stance.

Thirdly, I argue, with Foley Sherman, that the practice of attention brings with it a relation of care, and can thus form the ground for an ethics of relationship, whether in the specific context of performance or with the wider world. As Foley Sherman puts it, 'to attend is to care for. [...] Attention brings care to perception, and care orients me in a world that transforms me in the act of attending to it.'¹⁰⁶ The concept of 'paying' attention also implies that attending costs us something – time, energy, an alternative activity or moment of satisfaction sacrificed. 'For attendants, it costs something more than money to participate in the experiences of [...] performance'.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, our attention may be drawn unwittingly, even against our will, by a demand that supersedes

¹⁰⁶ Foley Sherman, pp. 15, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Foley Sherman, p. 13.

our current focus (a baby's wail interrupting quiet reading; the stabbing pain in a stubbed toe that abruptly shifts our gaze from the pleasant view). In both cases a choice has to be made, either consciously or unconsciously: we cannot pay attention to everything that engages our senses at once, as Stern points out. Performance can focus attention on a particular object of care, be it a philosophical concept, a political conjuncture, an aspect of the physical world or a set of relationships. But it always already presupposes an invitation of care within the relationship between performer(s) and spectators/participants, and therefore poses ethical choices for all those involved. These choices are not simply rehearsal for relationships out in the 'real world'; they are in and of themselves a practice that demands an ethical response. It goes without saying that this may be a choice to care for oneself, or for others not present, rather than the others immediately involved (whether performers or spectators), by protesting, leaving, or otherwise disrupting the presented relationship.

Finally, I return to this practice of bodily attention in my own work, and to this mode of engagement with the world, because it has consistently been, for me, a place of both grounding and wonder. One of the gifts of the practice of attention to the present moment is the sense that one can return home to the body, the breath, to physical sensation at any point – that paying attention to this physical reality can support a fragmented subject to feel more at one with herself and her world. But every so often, alongside the other sensations, impressions, affects and thoughts of which I may be aware in the moment of feeling present (and these may be unpleasant, unlooked-for or painful) there is an awareness of the profound mystery, and yet absolute fact, of my existence in this moment, this place, coupled with a knowledge of its utter unrepeatability. That I am alive, breathing an air shared by my human co-spectators in a vast auditorium, as well as by many other non-human beings within this space, witnessing a performer who also shares this breathing of the same air, and moves her body in ways that my motor cortex recognises and responds to, is not only a miracle of evolution and of the individual journeys that have brought each of our unique subjectivities to this moment, it is also

wonderfully singular. And as a moment that necessarily passes, it is precious precisely because of its vanishing ephemerality. Paying attention in this way, I am consistently struck by the small miracles of being (in) a body, in a remarkable and constantly shifting world of small details and large events. In my work I focus on the importance of each moment, the significance of small details and overlooked processes, the stuff of everyday life that forms the ground for experiences of heartbreak, surprise and spectacle. Focusing on these small details can open up tiny worlds in themselves, as I discover when I stand in stillness for some minutes and watch the continual minute shifts and movements that flicker through my body simply in order to maintain my balance. Equally when I watch another similarly standing, or sitting, still, I may observe these gentle ripples and twitches through the body, the stillness that Steve Paxton calls the 'small dance'.¹⁰⁸

Such moments are, of course, not the stuff of continuous experience. As Tallis points out, it would be impossible to get on with anything, including meeting the basic needs of our survival, if we were constantly tripping over the amazement of the moment. Indeed, not the least part of this wonder is the extent that we are able to take it for granted as we go about our everyday lives. Equally, there are many for whom the urgencies of survival or desperate danger make wonder inaccessible in their daily lives. But when we have the psychophysical capacity to embrace it, the awareness of being present is freely available at any moment, and always holds the potential for such points of profound connection with being. In addition to the kinds of practice I have already referred to, which in various ways work to develop sensitivity to this awareness, it is both my experience of it in performance, and the ephemerality of the form itself, that have led me to explore performance as a space that might open an avenue towards this sense of being present, through a sense of being-present-with, in a privileged, contained moment.

¹⁰⁸ Steve Paxton, '*Small Dance*', <<https://vimeo.com/19001115>> [accessed 1 July 2017].

Practice/Performance

Practice is a way of knowing that can never become reified into 'knowledge'¹⁰⁹ (though aspects of it may be codified). To be sure, there is a 'body of knowledge' associated with a vast range of practices, from surfing to weaving, but this is more than just a set of skills to be acquired by the novice. The term is peculiarly apposite, given the way in which practice is disseminated and skill developed. In the first place, these bodily techniques are largely passed on through a combination of physical demonstration and oral instruction, and as such are shaped and subtly altered by the particular attributes and attitude of the one(s) instructing. Once acquired, they are of course subject to infinite further adjustment through the individual's own practice and the ongoing influence of other instructors, peers and students. Each body will inherit, inhabit (and be inhabited by), and retransmit these practices in accordance with its physical configuration, affective response and the influence of other practices it is engaged in. Secondly, such techniques must be learned in body, *through* practice, a process that once again renders the knowledge itself unique, fitting to the body-mind it travels with. And this applies to all our learning of how we be, throughout our lives. Living beings, Sheets-Johnstone points out, do not arrive in the world with a fully formed set of pre-programmed rules for behaviour and engagement with their environment; not only do we learn 'which thing we are' by 'moving and listening to our own movement', but 'we came to know [the world] first by moving and touching our way through it, in a word, through our tactile-kinesthetic bodies.'¹¹⁰ The most comprehensive 'education' that consisted only in the acquisition of a vast amount of data *about* the physical world '[would] not provision [the student]

¹⁰⁹ In the sense of a fixed corpus of information. For Ingold, '[knowledge] is not a construction, governed by cognitive mechanisms of one sort or another, but an improvisatory movement – of "going along" or wayfaring – that is open-ended and knows no final destination.' (Tim Ingold, 'Footprints in the weather-world: Walking, breathing, knowing', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.), 16 (2010): S121-S139, p. S122). A case in point, even the London black cab drivers' famed 'knowledge' is in fact a practical knowing, developed and refined through years of driving the city's streets, and requiring constant renewed adaptation to temporary and longer-term changes in the environment.

¹¹⁰ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, pp. 49, 52.

with a *completed epistemology*.¹¹¹ Each individual must learn her own body-world, in a life-long process of wayfinding. Rather than an outcome or an acquisition, practice-knowing is a becoming.

Like any making practice, that of creating performance is a process of discovery: the movement from initial idea to presentation is itself a process of wayfinding, sometimes with a sense of destination, at others rather an engagement with journey in the expectation of ending up 'somewhere'. We do not start off knowing the work: we find it as it becomes. This is Ingold's 'art of inquiry', the practitioners of which, he suggests are 'by and large [...] to be found [...] among the ranks of practising artists.'¹¹² The journey, of course, does not end with the devising or rehearsal process; the work continues to find its way through its engagement with spectators/participants and in the individual reflections of all involved. Robin Nelson makes a compelling argument for practice as knowledge, and posits that in certain situations practice (or praxis), can offer a better account and/or experience of that knowledge than could a written analysis.¹¹³ Just as no manual can teach a child to walk, conceptualising experiences of space, time, proximity with others and so on cannot bring the immediate embodied understanding of those experiences that is offered by engaging directly with them. In my own work, the performance itself is more a way of finding out than of presenting something already known. I seek as far as possible to make this process of discovering apparent to those who accompany me, whether co-performers, participants or spectators. From the outset my work has been unrehearsed, an investigation of my body's capacities and the affective workings of endurance and physical proximity, but it is not only my own response that offers me new insights. I learn uniquely from the responses of those who engage with the work (whether overheard comments, the reactions of 'found audiences' in public spaces or the thoughtful responses of self-selected participants), which

¹¹¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 143.

¹¹² Ingold, *Making*, p. 7.

¹¹³ Robin Nelson, 'Practice-based research and the problem of knowledge', *Performance Research* 11.4 (2006), pp. 105-116.

offer me new layers of reflection on the questions I am asking – in one case to the extent that a new work emerged from participant responses to one-to-one performance.¹¹⁴

The practice I submit with this writing is not therefore presented directly as evidence of research or as the outcome of a research process. It is rather a parallel thinking, a weaving of body and bodily praxis into the language of my argument, an other way of thinking the concerns I address in this thesis without which the writing could not come into being. It is not a practice ‘directed within and at the academy’, like Nelson’s practice-as-research,¹¹⁵ but an integral and integrative part of my thinking. It has long been my practice to incorporate into any paper or talk I give a performative element, a light prompting to those present (including myself) to engage with bodily being in the moment. I do this not for effect (though I of course aim to elicit attention), but because this is where my thinking emerges, the land it travels through, and also where it comes home. While talking *about* work, I aim still to anchor it in the bodies that make it and receive/witness it. Equally here, my writing is not intended to explicate the practice I offer for engagement; they stand, and move, side by side and mutually inform one another.

I therefore invite receivers to read *Talking Matter*, the practice element of this submission, as one thread of the weave of my argument, engaging in a mode of thinking that I point to in the written text, but that brings a particular reflection into being through its articulation. *Talking Matter* was made as part of the process of this research, and the interaction moves my argument through reflection *in* material, bodies and language intertwined; no single one of these elements can give an account of the whole. It makes key points in my overall thesis in relation to presentness, the storing of memory and knowledge in matter, the improvisatory negotiation between material world and material

¹¹⁴ This was *audience : hearing*, a sound and video installation made in collaboration with composer John Levack Drever in 2007. The sound was composed from the recordings of over 100 individual silences made in *audience*; the video element consisted of four screens, over which scrolled fragments of text drawn from the responses of participants in the comments book for the earlier piece.

¹¹⁵ Nelson, p. 112.

body that forms the ground of any thinking, and the bodily, material substrate of language. It draws together, and develops, concerns that have been separately engaged in my one-to-one and my durational performance practices (addressed in the two interludes). It also unites the various aspects of presentness that I address in individual chapters, working on the levels of intersubjective presentness, bodily being and process, and fleshly engagement with the contingent, material world, and thus reflects back on the theoretical concerns raised through my engagement with key textual sources. While it exists (and has been presented in a variety of contexts) as a self-contained piece, I therefore invite readers to engage with it alongside their reading of the written text, at the point indicated following reading of the second interlude. The examiners for this thesis, participating in the live interaction, will inhabit this reflection and themselves participate in its becoming in the moment. Later readers are invited to view the documentation in Appendix 2.

Practice/Writing

Making this thesis has required intense and prolonged negotiation between ways of working, ways of thinking, ways of being in an attempt to find out how a body-based performance practice and writing can live together in a way that makes sense of the whole. It has been a struggle between articulating through language experiences and ideas that take form in a body, or in the shared spaces between bodies, and allowing a bodily practice and praxis to articulate themselves. The question behind Michel Serres' sensually rich, fleshly diatribe against disembodied language is encapsulated by Daniel Stern's evocation of the 'unreachable present moment [...] the ungraspable happening of our reality.' But Stern argues (in the therapeutic context) that 'it must be explored as best we can, to better think about it'.¹¹⁶ As Sheets-Johnstone puts it: 'The challenge is to language experience, which, to begin with, quintessentially

¹¹⁶ Stern, p. 9.

requires phenomenological attention to experience and a concomitant recognition of the fact that language is not experience.¹¹⁷

Language emerges from the body, and notwithstanding the privileging of this mode of articulation in contemporary culture, it can never escape its bodily, worldly origins. As Eugene Gendlin points out, “If we omit the enkinesthesia, we cut language off from how it is generated and experienced by bodies in situations.”¹¹⁸ The body is where I begin, where I live, and where I speak from. As a professional translator and endlessly curious linguist for over thirty years, I am well aware of the bodied contingency of language, the roots of language in both individual and collective bodies, and in the material environment. I am equally aware of the existence of many terms, concepts and indeed ways of thinking that cannot be even adequately transposed from one language to another; I submit that the thinking that manifests in *Talking Matter* is not only one such example, but sheds some light on where and how such untranslatability is rooted. Western academic practices of language, particularly scholarly writing, have predominantly been identified with cognitive analytical processes and stripped away from the bodies that produce them, and which they always already inhabit. Still, as Merleau-Ponty, Sheets-Johnstone and Serres point out, bodies, and the physical world, are always there. There can be no meaning without (bodied) experience. My decades-long engagement with the academy, as well as my commitment to, and learning from, body-based practice, spur my own desire to insist on care for the communication and expression that emerges through and between bodies. This begins in attending to the rich depth of memory and meaning that is available to me in my own body and particular relationship with my physical world, and flows out into harnessing ways this attention can invite a parallel attention in the spectator, and make space for a shared, open and wondering bodily being in and with a sensory, material world.

¹¹⁷ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 466.

¹¹⁸ Gendlin, ‘Implicit precision’, p. 150.

Chapter 1

Other/self: Negotiating the between in one-to-one performance

In considering the kinds of performance that could offer the potential for the spectator to sense her own presentness within the space of performance, one-to-one might seem a good place to start. Whether or not the performance achieves, or even aspires to, the close interpersonal connection that is sometimes claimed on its behalf (a question I consider in more detail below), the fact of finding oneself alone in close physical proximity with the performer suggests at the very least that it might stimulate awareness of physical co-presence, a shared being-in-space-and-time for the duration of the (often brief) interaction. In fact, as I hope to show, the various structural and psychological factors that come into play may act to complicate or block this sense of being-together-with. In this chapter I examine the dynamics of one-to-one performance, and the extent to which it both embraces and militates against direct engagement with shared bodily being. I consider how the articulation of the intersubjective encounter in this form has the potential to enact an ethics of relationship grounded in care and openness, and how this opening to the other is thereby a source of wonder. I also reflect on methodological and ethical questions of analysing one-to-one performance, given the necessarily solipsistic experience it offers both spectator and performer.

I reserve a slot for Michael Pinchbeck's performance The Long and Winding Road by phone, and arrive at my appointed time at a pedestrian precinct behind Euston Road in central London. In the middle of the precinct a graffiti-covered car is parked. A man with a clipboard stands nearby, takes my name and asks me to wait as the previous performance has not yet finished. A few minutes later the car's

passenger door opens, a woman gets out and, after a moment, I am invited to enter and sit in the front passenger seat. Pinchbeck sits in the driver's seat; the rest of the car is filled to the roof with parcels of various shapes and sizes wrapped in brown paper. Pinchbeck opens a tin of icing sugar-covered travel sweets, offers me one, and then begins to tell me a story. It begins with a precise date, and throughout the brief narrative this date and others recur in a rhythmic cycling as Pinchbeck recounts the accidental death of his brother, the ensuing process of clearing his brother's flat and resolving, over some years, how to dispose of his effects, and his path up to now on the journey which will eventually take him to see the car, full of his brother's possessions, driven into the river Mersey. Pinchbeck's tone is quiet, matter-of-fact, and this combined with the repetition of particular details – dates, his brother's address, the number of packages – generates a meditative rhythm to the narrative. He ends his story with the date on which the final event is to occur, and falls silent. The performance is clearly at an end, although a short time appears to be left for my response should I wish to make one. After a few words of exchange I leave the car, feeling quietly moved, with a sense that I have accompanied Pinchbeck on a very small part of his journey.¹

As Rachel Zerihan and others have noted, there has been a significant rise in the presentation of, and interest in, 'one-to-one' performances in recent years.²

¹ Michael Pinchbeck, *The Long and Winding Road*, Camden People's Theatre, 2008. See <<http://michaelpinchbeck.co.uk/long-winding-road/>> [accessed 27 November 2017].

² See, e.g. Lyn Gardner, 'I didn't know where to look', *The Guardian*, 3 March 2005, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/mar/03/theatre2>> [accessed 17 October 2010]; Rachel Zerihan, 'Intimate inter-actions: Returning to the body in one-to-one performance', *Body, Space and Technology Journal* 6.1 (2006) <<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0601/home.html>> [accessed 28 March 2009]. I concur with Zerihan in preferring the more relational connotations of the term 'one-to-one' over the suggestions of imposition in 'one-on-one' – a term which is however widely used in publicity as well as analytical writing. See Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan, 'A discussion on the subject of intimacy in performance, and an afterword', in Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan (eds), *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp 213-234 (p. 226); see also Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball and Rachel Zerihan, 'Come closer: Confessions of intimate spectators in one to one performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22.1 (2012), p. 121.

These performances are often promoted with promises of a unique, personal experience deriving from an intimate engagement (to cite just one example, performance company Breathe advertise their piece *Trailing Behind* as '[a] one-to-one site-specific performance in an intimate space [that] provides the spectator with an individual performative moment [...] It is private and personal, no one knows what goes on inside, it is just between the two bodies').³ Publicity for Battersea Arts Centre's first One-on-One festival, which presented dozens of one-to-one performances in a programme running over 12 days, promised 'individual performances, tailor-made especially for you [...] curious, intimate, scary.'⁴ BAC artistic director David Jubb maintained later that 'people were having quite personal, intimate experiences' at the festival;⁵ Bryony Byrne in *Aesthetica* magazine suggested that one reason for programming a second edition was that '[i]ntimacy seems to be the cornerstone' of BAC's projects.⁶ Zerihan, indeed, contends that 'the One to One performance format cultivates an especially intensive relationship in which an intimate exchange of dialogue between performer and spectator can take place'.⁷ Suggesting reasons for the rise in popularity of this form among artists and audiences, Lyn Gardner argues: 'Increasingly, it's felt that large playhouses can't deliver the intimacy of experience that audiences crave – so instead, theatre-goers and -makers are seeking out other spaces and other forms [...] The traditionally passive spectator is transformed into an active

³ Breathe, '*Trailing Behind*', <<http://www.breheartists.co.uk/#/trailingbehind/4518234994>> [accessed 17 October 2010]; for other examples see publicity for the Sprint One-on-One Festival at Camden People's Theatre (<<https://www.cpttheatre.co.uk/production/sprint-one-on-one-night-2/>>) [accessed 6 November 2017], Home Live Art Exchange at Latitude (<<http://www.homeliveart.com/event/home-live-exchange-at-latitude-festival/>> [accessed 6 November 2017], Brian Lobel's curated series 'Cruising for Art' (<<http://www.blobelwarming.com/cruising-for-art/>> [accessed 6 November 2017]), Lauren Hart's *This is Mine What's Yours?* (<<http://www.thisislaurenhart.com/this-is-mine-whats-yours.html>> [accessed 6 November 2017]), and Felicia Lee's *New York Times* article on 'intimate theater' (<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/28/theater/28one.html>> [accessed 6 November 2017]).

⁴ Battersea Arts Centre, 'One-on-One Festival', <<http://www.bac.org.uk/whats-on/one-on-one/>> [accessed 17 October 2010].

⁵ Bryony Byrne, 'An intimate performance', *Aesthetica*, <<http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/an-intimate-performance>> (2011) [accessed 19 May 2014].

⁶ Byrne.

⁷ Zerihan, 'Intimate inter-actions', p.1.

participant, inevitably changing the power relationship between audience member and performer.⁸ In a hypermediatised world, where the dominance of commodity and advertising produces ‘people’s *estrangement* from each other’⁹ while the popular media creates intimacy as image and aspiration through apparently limitless access to the ‘real life’ of the celebrities it generates, and social relations are increasingly conducted on a remote or virtual plane, individuals seek a return to the personal, to intersubjective connection and (self)-re-cognition, and strive to reclaim agency. And indeed, as Zerihan points out, the very form of the one-to-one itself contains a promise of access to the private, the personal: ‘Because those performances and actions can take place at such a private or even hidden level, they carry an affirmation of intimacy and the allure that comes with it.’¹⁰ Likewise, Heddon and Howells describe the one-to-one as ‘intimate, personal, interactive’, a form in which ‘the boundary between performer and spectator dissolves in the process of exchange, an exchange that asks for a committed and at times vulnerable spectatorship.’¹¹ But how intimate is one-to-one performance? Can it actually offer the closeness that ‘audiences crave’, given the structural conditions, psychic boundaries and relations of power that are likely to pertain in this form and tend to militate against a genuinely intimate interaction? If it does indeed afford the intense and charged encounter it promises, whence is this derived, and what form does it take?

In this chapter I consider these questions in relation to a number of one-to-one performances experienced over several years, drawing on philosophical considerations of intersubjectivity, notably the work of Emmanuel Lévinas and Luce Irigaray, to reflect on the particular relationship produced by one-to-one performance. As Heddon, Iball and Zerihan suggest, one-to-one performance is a problematic area for performance analysis given the inevitably subjective nature of the experience for each spectator (and performer), and the difficulty

⁸ Gardner, ‘I didn’t know’.

⁹ Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1992), p. 36.

¹⁰ Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, ‘A discussion’ p. 221.

¹¹ Deirdre Heddon and Adrian Howells, ‘From talking to silence: A confessional journey’, *PAJ* 33.1 (2011): 1-12 (p. 1).

of accounting critically for an experience that cannot be comparatively assessed by other spectators.¹² Nevertheless, I contend that Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's argument that 'the truths of experience are as proper an aim of science as the truths of behaviour',¹³ is particularly apposite with regard to the analysis of performance, where the perception of 'quality' is intrinsic to the experience.¹⁴ With regard to the necessarily isolated experience of the one-to-one, I propose that one way to give analysis of this mode of performance the same kind of *body* as reflection on one-to-many performances that can be seen by a multiplicity of spectators might be to consider multiple accounts of individual experiences. I suggest that phenomenological investigation of 'thick descriptions' of many different one-to-ones (experienced as a spectator) and/or multiple iterations of one (as a performer) can offer insights into the modes of being and engagement that this form articulates. I consider how the actual experience of these interactions compares with the claims made for them, and can be used to give flesh to some more abstract theoretical considerations of intersubjectivity and the one-to-one relationship. I examine whether there is indeed something unique and special about this form, to what extent its promise of 'intimacy' is fulfilled, and if it is, how this intimacy manifests. My case studies form the basis for an argument for one-to-one performance as articulating an ethics of personal relationship grounded in care and openness to the other. I show how this resonates with the relational openness proposed by Irigaray, and thereby creates a space for open-ended wonder. I suggest that while Lyn Gardner's contention that the performer-audience power relationship is necessarily reversed in one-to-one is questionable, the form itself can ask questions about that power relationship that may be elided in

¹² Heddon, Iball and Zerihan. Helen Freshwater has pointed out the problems inherent in critical assumptions of unity of response in a collective audience (Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 5-6).

¹³ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. xxiv.

¹⁴ 'In aesthetic experience, we do not see quadriceps, biceps, or gluteals bulging now and again in contraction; we do not hear three 60 decibel G's followed by an 80 decibel E; we do not see a few flecks of greenish paint with a few daubs of red beside them; we do not see a fairly heavy-looking chunk of gray metal sitting on a stand. In aesthetic experience, we perceive the quality of whatever is being presented: a dance, a symphony, a painting, a sculpture.' Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 98.

other forms of performance.

Intimacy is by definition a personal and subjective phenomenon and hence a slippery concept. Popular understandings rest on a generalised, unquestioning assumption of 'intimacy' as a desirable access to, or sharing of, private aspects of oneself, usually with a singular other,¹⁵ and it is thus unsurprising that accounts of 'intimate' one-to-one performance rarely offer to define the term, assuming a general understanding of a vague concept variously encompassing closeness, privacy and revelation. Berlant, however, points out that this superficial understanding belies the problematic, troubling nature of intimacy as it does arise in the day-to-day: rooted in desire or fear, it destabilises the structures intended to contain it.¹⁶ More recently, performance studies has begun to approach the question of intimacy and how it might be defined and practised in a range of performance contexts.¹⁷ And as Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan point out, one-to-one *performance* has the potential to problematise Kristeva's notion of the intimate as 'in opposition to social or political action',¹⁸ to articulate the intersubjective intimate as a highly politicised, and even policed, zone and thus to re-place it in the raw, troubling social role that Berlant suggests for the truly intimate, a model that resonates with the challenging fluid openness Irigaray posits as the cornerstone of the ethical relationship.

Historically the term 'intimate', originally denoting 'the inmost nature of a thing' (from the Latin *intimus*, 'inmost'¹⁹), extended to describe that which is

¹⁵ Hence the titillating attraction of popular media stories purporting to reveal celebrities' 'intimate secrets', allowing the reader to adopt the fantasy role of lover/confidant/confessor with privileged access to the object of desire (or revulsion).

¹⁶ Lauren Berlant, 'Intimacy: A special issue', in *Intimacy*, ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 1-7 (pp. 2-3).

¹⁷ Most notably through the curatorial and critical work of Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan; see in particular Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, eds, *Intimacy*; also of note is Dee Heddon's work with the late Adrian Howells.

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, quoted in Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹⁹ *Online Etymology Dictionary*,

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=intimate&allowed_in_frame=0> [accessed 21

‘relating to one’s deepest thoughts or feelings, closely personal, private’.²⁰ As Edgar Levenson notes, over the course of the 20th century the Western concept of ‘intimacy’ shifted ‘from something inside to something outside, from most inner to most inbetween [...] from an essentially intrapsychic concept to an essentially interpersonal one’.²¹ The *most* intimate interior of the subject became the province of psychoanalysis and related intersubjective investigations of the individual’s inner world; the sense of the intimate arising through relationship became dominant in the psychological literature and elsewhere. Psychologist Karen Prager defines intimate interaction as ‘one in which partners share personal, private material, feel positively about each other and themselves, and perceive a mutual understanding between them.’²² (Prager points out that while mutual sharing is assumed in this general definition, what is experienced as intimate by one partner may not be so by the other – a useful caveat in relation to one-to-one performance, and a reminder that the *experience* of intimacy is still a slipperily subjective one.) In the context of performance, Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan also emphasise the relational:

Intertwined with feelings of closeness, trust and familiarity, intimacy occurs through effective communication between people in some kind of relationship. Intimacy enables *two* sentient beings, who feel comfortable enough with each other on an emotional and/or physical level, to reveal something about themselves and connect in some form of meaningful exchange.²³

February 2014]. It is interesting that Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan framed their project from the beginning in terms of the fleshly interiority of the body: ‘Intimacy across *visceral* and digital performance’ (my italics).

²⁰ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by Lesley Brown, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 1402.

²¹ Edgar A. Levenson, ‘Changing concepts of intimacy in psychoanalytic practice’, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 10 (1974), 359-369.

²² Karen Prager, *The Psychology of Intimacy*, (New York & London: Guildford Press, 1995), p. 22.

²³ Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, ‘Introduction’, p. 1 (my emphasis). It is noteworthy, and significant for the one-to-one performance, that intimacy is considered the province of two individuals rather than a plurality.

As Zerihan notes,²⁴ it is the very subjectivity of the experience of intimacy (and equally, of the one-to-one performance) that makes it hard to account for and perhaps explains the absence of clear definition of how it might be constituted, in performance or elsewhere. Heddon, Iball and Zerihan, indeed, ascribe the resistance of scholars to engage with one-to-one performance to ‘the unappealing yet inescapable subjectivity inherent’ in critical analysis of the form.²⁵ In view of this, the suggestion of psychologists Lisa Register and Tracy Henley, that a phenomenological analysis of multiple personal accounts may be helpful in identifying some common features of the experience of intimacy, is particularly apposite. Writing as psychologists aiming to go beyond the variously unspecific definitions of intimacy found in the psychological literature to sketch out a paradigm for intimate experience in social and personal relationships, they propose a phenomenological method that allows them to identify a number of key themes arising in personal narratives of intimate experience. These are ‘(1) non-verbal communication, (2) presence, (3) time, (4) boundary, (5) body, (6) destiny and surprise and (7) transformation’.²⁶ While several of these elements are clearly likely to be present in one-to-one performance, some of them, as I show below, may prove problematic – in particular boundary (experienced as ‘the removal of boundaries between people’), destiny and surprise (the sense that the intimacy felt was ‘unexpected, but also destined’), and transformation.²⁷ Given the inevitable subjectivity of accounts of one-to-one performance, and the unsystematic reporting of it, Register and Henley’s method offers a way of engaging with this material, and suggests that analysis of multiple empirical accounts may likewise be useful in drawing out some of the ways in which notions of intimacy may be played out, and moments of intimacy experienced, in the context of these encounters. Heddon and co-authors, in an article drawn from their own personal responses to a series of one-to-one performances,

²⁴ Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, ‘A discussion’, p. 220.

²⁵ Heddon, Iball and Zerihan, pp. 121-122.

²⁶ Lisa M. Register and Tracy B. Henley, ‘The phenomenology of intimacy’, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 9 (1992), 467-481.

²⁷ Register and Henley, pp. 475-476.

propose their collaborative comparison of individual experience as a method of 'SPaR (Spectator-Participation-as-Research)', an 'acronym [that] intentionally signals the relational dynamic embedded in the One to One form'.²⁸ If we are to engage in depth with the particularity of one-to-one performance, we must embrace the subjective account as our principal mode of access to audience experience. The reader is thus placed (at one remove) in a position similar to that of the spectator: can she trust the spectator/participant's account as genuine, rather than bogus or misrecognised affect? While this 'unappealing subjectivity' may disturb the reader seeking an 'objectively' critical account of how such performance operates, it may also offer a gentle reminder of the reader's own subjective input into her interpretation of such accounts.

A further difficulty in addressing 'intimacy' in one-to-one performance is that, as generally understood, intimacy in relationship holds at least the potential for some equality of experience between those involved. While differences in status and communication capacity may well be present (as in the case of some of Register and Henley's informants – a woman caring for her friend's baby, a vet tending to a sick dog), there is still a sense that something that can be termed 'intimacy' or 'closeness' can be felt on both sides: this is an experience that is *shared* in some way, a passage of affect between two beings. It is then somewhat problematic that the majority of the limited critical writing on one-to-one performance is written from the point of view of the *spectator*, and considers intimacy as experienced on only one side of the equation. Accounts of the performer's experience are few (with the notable exception of Adrian Howells' generous and perceptive reflection on his progress through research into performances for one spectator at a time).²⁹ To an extent this is understandable – the focus of the one-to-one, like any other performance, is on offering something to the spectator (and performer narratives might be deemed even more partial and 'unappealingly subjective' than spectator accounts) –

²⁸ Heddon, Iball and Zerihan, p. 122.

²⁹ See Dominic Johnson, 'Held: An interview with Adrian Howells', in *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* ed. by Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson (London/Chicago: Live Art Development Agency/Intellect, 2016), pp. 98-118; see also Heddon and Howells.

but to deny the performer's affective response, or indeed her expectation of some return or reaction on the part of the spectator, would be disingenuous. And if we are to account for spectators' reported experiences of intimate connection in such performance, an exploration of the performer's affective involvement can perhaps help to ground those reports in a shared affective context, even if the experience is necessarily different for spectator and performer. I shall consider the performer's experience in more detail later in this chapter; I now return to some of the problematic considerations of claiming any kind of intimacy for one-to-one performance.

Underlying the predominant understanding in the psychological and psychoanalytic literature, of intimacy as the province of the private and the intersubjective, and clearly emerging in the personal accounts of Register and Henley's informants, is a sense of the intimate experience as something special and unrepeatable, unique to the individuals involved. Here we already arrive at one of the difficulties in claiming intimacy for one-to-one performance. My first approach to *The Long and Winding Road* makes this immediately apparent: I have to book an appointment. I share an individual interaction with the performer, but I am forcefully made aware that I am not alone in this: time slots are at a premium when I reserve mine, and the fact that I have to wait outside the car (and that the next spectator is waiting when I leave), suggests a steady stream of individuals presenting themselves for this 'unique' encounter. To this awareness might be added the highly ritualised and scripted nature of the performance itself: this telling is clearly not spontaneous, and I am not privileged in being offered the travel sweet (my imagination conjures a stash of similar tins hidden somewhere in the car). In his narrative Pinchbeck alludes directly to the repetition of the performance (which has toured to a number of locations and is presented over three days at this venue), highlighting the importance of reiteration in his journey, but at the same time reinforcing the spectator's awareness that she is but one of many. Rather than feeling reassured of the specialness of her encounter, she may find herself asking the questions Helen Paris suggests in her account of Curious's *Deserter*: 'Is the

intimacy [...] less intimate because it is repeated verbatim to each audience member who passes through? Does the performer 'perform' intimacy? Are [his] words meaningless [...]?'³⁰ My subjective experience is necessarily unique, but is it any more so than my experience as part of a collective audience witnessing a performance together?

Boundaries

Relationships, whether within groups or between individuals, are always of course inflected by the wider socioeconomic context in which they take form and are maintained. But the repetition of one-to-one performance highlights the fact that it is embedded in the wider economy of performance. Through repetition, the performance is clearly manifested as produced and reproduced by the labour of the artist, who is required to repeat it in order to render it financially and/or creatively viable for himself and for programmers. As with all performance, economic and structural conditions militate against the 'spontaneous' and 'unique' intimate experience. Often the spectator will be required to buy entry into the performance. In other cases the performance may be supported directly or indirectly through public or private project funding; in still others, the artist herself will assume the financial cost of presenting the work, supporting this activity through other means. In all of these cases, the overt or concealed economic exchange clearly marks the performer's activity as labour, and the performance itself as a commodity or service that the spectator is buying or that is bought on her behalf. None of these arrangements suggests the spontaneity and unexpectedness, let alone the uniqueness, evoked in other accounts of intimate encounters. As Ridout points out, the 'theatre of capitalism' revolves around an 'intimate economic relation' such that '[our] intimacy is always already alienated.'³¹ Neither I nor Pinchbeck can pretend that this sharing of deeply personal material takes place

³⁰ Helen Paris, 'Too close for comfort: One-to-one performance', in *Performance and Place*, ed. by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 179-191 (p. 189).

³¹ Ridout, *Stage Fright*, p. 80.

on some plane abstracted from economic relations. Moreover, the knowledge that I am one in a long line of others, and that had I not come, someone else could have been here in my place, precludes the sense of an experience 'destined to happen'. At the BAC One-on-One festival this reality was acutely highlighted, as the purchase of a ticket, the crowds, and the series of back-to-back experiences, many of short duration, worked to obviate the sense of personal, private encounter. Spectators were invited to reserve places for a number of one-to-one performances, selected from an extensive 'menu', over the space of an evening visit. BAC's multitude of different spaces offered the potential for a wide range of encounters, most of which were well protected within their individual spaces of 'intimacy'. However, the overall effect was not so much of personal closeness but rather of a series of encounters that came to seem increasingly contrived and un-intimate. Inevitably, access to any of the performances was through the more 'public' foyer and corridor spaces of the building where dozens of other spectators mingled or rushed to their next appointment. Several times I had to wait outside a space for my exact appointment time (late arrival meant not getting in); for other performances without a reservation process there was generally a queue more suggestive of production-line uniformity than of unique, unrepeatable experience. The performances I chose to engage with were in themselves quite distinct from one another (a testimony to the varied programming that was a strength of the festival), and the cumulative effect of the evening was of a set of encounters, each contained by its time limits and the pressure of other spectators, which ultimately contributed to a degree of alienation and separateness that ran counter to the vulnerability and mutual exposure the promise of intimacy might suggest. This is not to say that I did not experience moments of connection or personal interaction in some of these encounters; but in this experience of many one-to-ones one after the other (and many co-spectators having the same or similar encounters at the same time) the elements of uniqueness, mutual removal of boundaries and of the intimate encounter having its own time were absent; I came away with the feeling that much of any sense of 'intimacy' generated was through the effort of spectators

themselves and related rather to an encounter with self than to a mutual opening. (Franko B's piece *You Me Nothing*, in which the spectator was invited to sit in an empty room for as long as she wished, pointed – perhaps mischievously, perhaps ironically – to this reality.) I shall argue below that this sense of self-encounter is central to reported experiences of intimacy in one-to-one performance.

However, such structural and economic parameters apply to all professional performance: indeed, as Ridout points out, 'when the promise of a direct face-to-face encounter between two human beings is made within the theatrical set-up, either the act of delivery or the act of collection is always compromised'³² – and spectators are accustomed, if we are to be open to being touched or moved, to putting them, consciously or unconsciously, to one side. Pinchbeck is recounting a deeply personal story of loss and resolution, sharing it with a single individual in the confined space of the car, and notwithstanding the spectator's awareness that the encounter is not unique, this might still suggest some potential for intimate interaction. However, within the performance itself further obstacles to spontaneous, 'unique' intimate exchange come into play, in the form of structural and psychic boundaries. Despite the putative risk played up by publicity for, and accounts of, one-to-one performance (the BAC festival is promoted with the words 'scary – face your fears'), and the genuine trepidation experienced by anxious would-be audiences,³³ both performer and spectator manage this risk through a variety of conscious and unconscious strategies, only the most obvious of which is to avoid it altogether ('[when booking slots for performances] I was able to suggest things [...] I was absolutely NOT [interested in] (no bathing!)').³⁴

³² Ridout, *Stage Fright*, p. 32.

³³ See e.g. Dominic Cavendish, 'One on One Festival, BAC London, review', *Daily Telegraph* 9 July 2010, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/7881731/One-On-One-Festival-BAC-London.html>> [accessed 11 January 2014], webcowgirl, 'Review – One on One Festival – Battersea Arts Centre', 9 July 2010 <<http://webcowgirl.wordpress.com/2010/07/09/review-one-on-one-festival-battersea-arts-centre/>> [accessed 11 January 2014].

³⁴ webcowgirl.

The performance encounter is likely to be highly structured. Duration is usually quite precisely set (one-to-ones tend necessarily to be of short duration, maximising the intensity of the encounter and the number of interactions that can be offered within a given time period). Publicity for *The Long and Winding Road* clearly stated that the performance would last five minutes. Marketing and programme information, or personal recommendation, are likely to have given the spectator some idea of the performance content, influencing her expectations. Thus the spectator's encounter is already being shaped by external structure and her own preconceptions.

Structural boundaries also serve the purpose of managing risk within the performance, for both performer and spectator. At the heart of any significant or sustained one-to-one encounter with another lies the risk of emotional damage or even physical harm, a risk that we are constantly negotiating in our search for closeness – and one that is also played on in programmers' efforts to entice audiences. Just as in a one-to-one relationship, the more deeply the individual engages – the more she allows herself the 'vulnerability' Heddon and Howells suggest – the more she is exposed to the possibility of being hurt.³⁵ As singular audiences, spectators of the one-to-one do not have the security of fellow spectators to laugh with, grasp onto or offer safety in numbers in the (unlikely) event of physical attack. In this case I enact an embracing of personal risk (as a lone woman getting into a car with a strange man), but the context itself demarcates this otherwise risky behaviour as a performance, on my part as much as Pinchbeck's. In addition to my prior awareness of the established institution behind the presentation of this piece, my knowledge of the brief duration of the performance I am about to see, and the overall idea the publicity has given me of its content, allay my fear of

³⁵ A risk that is not necessarily confined to the spectator, as Jess Dobkin, another artist making one-to-one performance (on whom more below), indicates: 'Any disclosure makes the performer vulnerable to being misunderstood; this is the risk that is required when intimate revelations are brought to an audience.' Jess Dobkin, 'Performing with mother's milk: *The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar*', in Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, eds, *Intimacy*, pp. 62-73 (p. 70).

finding myself alone, confronted with an other, in the relatively confined space of the car, by limiting the scope for our interaction.

The internal structure of the performance reiterates these boundaries of safety. The performance clearly has a well-defined script and a ritualised, rhythmic format. Again, one-to-one performance usually has a strongly defined internal structure, generating both physical and psychic boundaries. Physical boundaries may include items of set, defined positions to be taken by performer and spectator, costume or clothing which demarcates the performer. These boundaries offer safety to both performer and spectator, but also support and are reinforced by the psychic boundaries that the two are likely to have erected in order to render this encounter safe enough. A precise script or structure offers safety to both performer and viewer: the performer will not be tempted to go beyond what is psychically sustainable for him, and will know what he can offer in the form of self-disclosure or openness to the other's self-disclosure. (Zerihan suggests that Chris Burden's 'radical act' *Shoot* was a response to a perceived invasion of personal space and boundaries experienced in his previous performance *Five-Day Locker Piece*, pointing to the caution that the performer offering an experience of 'intimacy' needs to exercise with regard to her own self-integrity.)³⁶ The spectator will bring her own subconscious limits, informed by her prior knowledge of the piece's content; these may be manifested in a range of attitudes, from apprehension to detachment or cynicism, but her most fundamental boundary will be the knowledge that *this is a performance*, that she can to some extent abstract the experience from 'real' life. As Herbert Blau suggests, the revelation that the audience anticipates from theatre (and how much more, the exposure of and to the other that we apparently seek in the 'intimate' encounter of one-to-one) might actually be the risk we ourselves cannot manage; the 'revelation', within the safe boundaries of performance, enacts a necessary censorship that keeps

³⁶ In *Five-Day Locker Piece* Burden had himself shut in a small locker and found himself repeatedly obliged to listen to the problems and life stories of people he did not know. Zerihan, 'Intimate inter-actions'. Adrian Howells also speaks of his experience of going beyond 'safe' boundaries in his work; I discuss his reflections in more detail below. See Johnson.

us safe from the knowledge that would destroy us.³⁷ And indeed, while many one-to-ones do propose an overstepping or breach of physical boundaries (for example Kira O'Reilly's *Untitled Action for Bomb Shelter*, as discussed by Zerihan, or much of Adrian Howells' work), the psychic boundaries of performance frame and emotional distancing on the part of both participants are by this very action redoubled: both performer and spectator put physical safeguards and psychic caveats in place. The spectator for O'Reilly's piece, in which she is invited to engage with wounds cut in O'Reilly's skin, wears surgical gloves; participants in Howells' *The Pleasure of Being Held* are reassured that they need undress only as far as they feel comfortable, if at all, that they may opt out of any part of the interaction, and that they are free to leave at any time. Spectators, particularly those unfamiliar with the form, are likely to 'gird themselves up' or 'arm themselves' against what they perceive as a challenge to their psychic integrity: 'There is a level of courage required on the part of the audience for any one-to-one,' suggests Nikki Millican on her programming of one-to-ones for the National Review of Live Art.³⁸

In *The Long and Winding Road*, the psychic boundaries are manifested by the gaps in the script. The performance deals with highly personal material, yet at no point does Pinchbeck make any reference to his feelings about the death of his brother or his relationship with his family. There is no outpouring of grief, and the spectator is left to derive the emotional significance of Pinchbeck's experience, and of the performance, from what is left out rather than what is included. His matter-of-fact, almost remote tone and the rhythmic repetition of dates and places create a safe space for the spectator to engage with her empathy with him and her own experiences of loss. This reticence is part of what makes the performance so affecting – an affect born in my own empathy with what is not revealed to me: 'the other is known through sympathy, as another "myself", the alter ego.'³⁹ Though I feel deeply touched by Pinchbeck's performance, I leave with the sense not of a close interpersonal encounter, but

³⁷ Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 202-206.

³⁸ Nikki Millican, quoted in Gardner, 'I didn't know'.

³⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1979), pp. 74-75.

rather of having been offered a space for personal contemplation of loss. Pinchbeck's detachment, combined with the looming but veiled presence of his absent brother in the wrapped packages, rather hints at the profound unknowability of the other: 'the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery. The other's entire being is constituted by its exteriority, or rather its alterity'.⁴⁰ I shall consider this question of the utter unknowability of the other, and the potential of one-to-one performance both to address and to harness it, below.

The structured, boundaried and economically contingent nature of the one-to-one performance encounter thus differentiates it from intimacy both as defined in the psychological and psychoanalytic literature and as generally understood, placing it in parallel with the transaction between prostitute and client, in which an 'intimate' encounter is promised in exchange for money, and in which what transpires between the partners is restricted both by the terms of the transaction and by the internal boundaries each has set up. Julia O'Connell Davidson notes that while the client may project a fantasised intimacy onto the encounter, the sex worker's experience will be very different: what the client is buying is the power to command her labour, and simultaneously to objectify her, to construct her as 'object to the other's subject'.⁴¹ In the meantime the sex worker will have her own practical and psychological strategies to maintain her integrity: as a performer colleague and former sex worker puts it, 'I'm aware of the tactics which I would use to distance myself from that client before and during our interaction.'⁴² In the promises of intimacy in one-to-one performance, this same 'fiction of mutuality'⁴³ is enacted, as the spectator transacts with the performer to perform this action 'just for her'. From this point

⁴⁰ Lévinas, *Temps*, p. 63.

⁴¹ Julia O'Connell Davidson, *Prostitution, Power and Freedom*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 208.

⁴² Anonymous, personal communication, 6 April 2009.

⁴³ O'Connell Davidson, p. 158.

of view, Jess Dobkin's performance *Fee for Service*⁴⁴ offers both a paradigmatic example of the way one-to-one performance works and a subversion of the format. In this work Dobkin offers the spectator the use of her vagina as a pencil sharpener, directly referencing the kind of bodied encounter popularly construed as 'intimate'.

Contract and power

I arrive at the performance space, and find that there is a queue for the performance. Spectators are regularly moving forward, every so often passing one by one through a curtained entrance. When I reach the front of the queue, I am asked by a 'receptionist' to pay £2, in return for which I receive a specially inscribed pencil to be sharpened in Dobkin's 'pencil sharpener'. After a short wait, I am ushered through the curtain to where Dobkin sits on a couch. She greets me in a friendly, welcoming manner: I feel that I am being put at my ease. She then invites me to inspect her 'vulva', which proves to be an elaborately embroidered fascia placed over her own genitalia. When I express my admiration, a brief, mildly flirtatious exchange ensues. Dobkin then asks if I would like my pencil sharpened, and offers the options that I can watch as she sharpens it, or insert it myself. I choose the latter, and push the pencil tentatively into her 'vagina'. I am immediately startled by a brief, buzzing vibration as a mechanical pencil sharpener is activated around my pencil. When the vibration stops, I withdraw the pencil, and after a moment more of bantering conversation, leave as directed through a side exit.

Dobkin's performance clearly references the interaction between sex worker and client: alongside the directly sexual reference of the central action, the financial transaction conducted through the 'receptionist', the bordello-like setting, with couch, curtained entrance and discreet side exit, the strictly limited range of options offered for engagement, and the brisk execution of the

⁴⁴ Jess Dobkin, *Fee for Service*, 'Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance' conference, 7-9 December 2007, organised by Goldsmiths Digital Studios at Goldsmiths College and venues across south-east London.

agreed service, accompanied by Dobkin's friendly but no-nonsense attitude, all allude directly to the transactions commonly made between prostitute and client. But it is precisely through this representation that Dobkin goes further, challenging the perceived intimacy of one-to-one performance. The real financial transaction incorporated into the performance (at an event where other performances were externally ticketed or 'free'), the challenging of gendered relations of power, the invocation of the 'vagina dentata' and the parodic deflation of heterosexual intercourse can also help us to understand the nature of the transaction between performer and spectator in the one-to-one.

In her subversion of traditional gender roles, Dobkin draws attention to the power relations pertaining in this interaction. While ostensibly performing the role of 'tart with a heart' providing an 'essential' service, she in fact takes power within her performed role and points to the power the performer has over any spectator to direct her/his participation in the performance. From the start, the spectator's role is precisely determined, but inverted from traditional gender stereotypes. For my £2, I am given a phallus, a surrogate penis with which to penetrate Dobkin's 'vagina'. By the same token, a male spectator is emasculated, rendered impotent in the performance as he is given the same substitute for his own non-performing member. Despite this gender equalisation, each of us is ultimately castrated as Dobkin's 'body' (in the form of the automatic pencil sharpener) asserts its power over the spectator's phallus, controlling the physical interaction with mechanical timing and truncating the pencil. Whether we choose the voyeuristic route of watching Dobkin sharpen the pencil or the active role of penetration, we are cut down to size and reminded of our very limited agency within this encounter. Thus Dobkin inverts the dynamic of the sex worker-client transaction, but also reveals the actual power relations of the one-to-one performance. Dobkin's 'body' asserts her power over the spectator, highlighting that it is she who directs and controls the interaction. The spectator is not at liberty to do what she/he will with the performer, and with her/his gender identity reversed, it is

rather she/he who is in some sense objectified by the performance. By using the model of the sex worker-client interaction, Dobkin also points directly both to the performer's labour in the performance and to the repetition of the encounter, the long line of those who come after. The 'intimate' encounter proves quite the reverse.

On the surface, then, it would appear that the economic contingency and concerns of psychic and physical safety directly articulated in Dobkin's performance, but characteristic of the form in general, preclude genuine closeness, or indeed any spontaneous intersubjective encounter, in the one-to-one. It might thus be tempting to suggest that the claims made for one-to-one performance are empty, that it offers merely a simulacrum of intimacy and hence emerges as simply one more element in the mediatised economy of spectacle. But spectators repeatedly report experiences of 'intimacy', profound affect and even transformation in one-to-one performance encounters, as the responses to Curious's performances and Zerihan's detailed descriptions of her own experience testify.⁴⁵ If, as Zerihan argues, one-to-one performance can offer a highly charged encounter of unusual intensity, and indeed some experience of 'intimacy', and if this does not come from a genuinely intimate *interaction*, where might it lie?

Closer examination of Zerihan's 2006 account suggests a subtle shift from intimacy of *interaction* to intimacy *with self*. Of Kira O'Reilly's piece *Untitled Action for Bomb Shelter*, she notes: 'O'Reilly's use of the One to One format in this performance allows her to (metaphorically and literally) bring you face to face with *your own thoughts and contemplations* about the opportunity she affords you with.'⁴⁶ Recounting her experience of Random Scream's *Reflection*, she states: '[performer] Freeman's gift of a form of corporeal catharsis provided the opportunity for *an intimate self-sharing and self-discovering* that [...] is

⁴⁵ See Paris, p. 183-184; Zerihan, 'Intimate interactions', pp. 9, 13. The question remains of the performer's experience of 'intimacy', a subject I reflect on further below.

⁴⁶ Zerihan, p. 10 (my emphasis)

unique to and lies at the core of the lure of inter-action in One to One performance.⁴⁷ Likewise, both Zerihan and Iball describe a clarity of *self*-understanding, or confirmation of *self*-revelation, in response to the performances they and Heddon witness in their collaborative research.⁴⁸ Other accounts of spectator experience reiterate this suggestion: '[sometimes] the best encounters are with yourself'⁴⁹; 'it's all about you, what you bring to the performances, what the performances ask of you.'⁵⁰

The first clue to the potential for self-encounter in the one-to-one might be in the economic structure of the event itself. The spectator is commonly required to book a slot for the performance, marking a period of both her own and the performer's time as special. (At the BAC One-on-One festival, spectators were strictly abjured that failure to turn up on time would mean missing their 'appointment'.) And just as when booking an appointment with a doctor, hairdresser or psychotherapist, the spectator's anticipated sense of the encounter may be that this time in some sense belongs to her. Not just the time, moreover, for in booking a personal meeting with the performer, she may expect to be reserving a moment of the performer's dedicated attention. The relationship inherent in all performance presupposes that the performer is in some way paying attention to the audience, whether many or one, but in the one-to-one the focus of this attention on a single spectator invites expectations of personal engagement on some level. (While I accept that my GP sees many other patients, any number of whom may 'present' with similar conditions, I expect him still to pay attention to my experience, questions and treatment preferences. Part of the disappointment experienced by some spectators of some one-to-ones may well be due to the sense – articulated by Heddon and

⁴⁷ Zerihan, p. 14 (my emphasis)

⁴⁸ Heddon, Iball and Zerihan.

⁴⁹ Lyn Gardner, 'One-on-One Festival – Review', *The Guardian*, 1 April 2011
<<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/apr/01/one-on-one-festival-review>> [accessed 11 January 2014]

⁵⁰ Hazel, 'Theatre review: One on One Festival @ BAC', *Londonist.com*, 9 July 2010
<http://londonist.com/2010/07/theatre_review_one_on_one_festival.php> [accessed 11 January 2014]

co-authors in relation to Sam Rose's *Bed of Roses*⁵¹ – that the performer is not fully engaging with the individual spectator's contribution, has not 'seen' the subject-spectator-for-herself.) Conversely, as I noted above the performance encounter in general implies a degree of commitment on the part of the spectator, an agreement to give some attention to the performer. In one-to-one performance this resonates powerfully with the individual sense of responsibility toward the singular other addressed by Emmanuel Lévinas. The face-to-face (either actual or metaphorical) is the focal point of one-to-one performance: it is also a cornerstone of Lévinas' ethical approach, which thus offers a pertinent (but, I suggest, problematic) reflection on what might be at stake in the form. For Lévinas the responsibility toward the other is always already there in the face-to-face encounter, preceding the subject's freedom and indeed her/his subjectivity itself. By virtue of her/his absolute alterity, the other gives us an awareness of our own finitude, and hence a self. By this very token the face-to-face instigates a responsibility for this *other* self – or as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, this entirely other 'origin'.⁵² This responsibility, because it always already precedes the subject's freedom, manifests as 'a passivity more passive than all passivity'.⁵³ In performance, this passivity is played out in the urge to 'behave' as a 'good' spectator – an urge that is heightened, and perceived to matter more, in the one-to-one as the spectator is confronted with a version of this primal self-realisation in the face of the other.⁵⁴ While my desire may be for the performer to take care of me in some way, I may also have a sense of my responsibility/response-ability to her. This may range from simple anxiety about whether I will perform my 'role' as spectator correctly⁵⁵ to a more actively altruistic concern for the performer's well-being (as evinced in

⁵¹ 'Rose did not ask anything about me. [...] [The piece's] relational potential was foreclosed because the script was "closed" rather than "open", driven by the artist rather than the process.' Heddon, Iball and Zerihan, pp. 128-129.

⁵² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2013), p. 24.

⁵³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence* (Amsterdam: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 31.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Hazel, 'Review': 'this is perhaps the most rewarding, satisfying element of this challenging festival – how important YOU the audience member is [*sic*] to the production and processes of theatre.' This sense of responsibility is strikingly encapsulated in Zerihan's response to Adrian Howells' *The Garden of Adrian*: see Heddon, Iball and Zerihan.

⁵⁵ An anxiety vividly recounted by the participant in *audience* quoted in Interlude 1, below.

Zerihan's focus on O'Reilly's physical pain and bodily integrity).⁵⁶ I risk at least disappointing the other, at worst contributing to her suffering. Whether I sense the other as a mirror to myself or as one for whom my responsibility precedes my own subjectivity, participating in her pain is liable to open the wound in myself which, as Blau suggests, we ask performance to present only through a veil.

To the expectation of the performer's attention is added a degree of self-consciousness that resonates to some extent with that evoked by Ridout when the individual spectator feels suddenly *singled out* in the audience of many.⁵⁷ In some sense this self-consciousness is part of the point of the one-to-one – it is hardly possible to embark on this engagement with the same assumption of anonymity as when entering a large auditorium and settling in the comfortable expectation of remaining in the dark. For some spectators, particularly those less conversant with the form, it may be uppermost to the point of being excruciating or almost paralysing: thus Lyn Gardner notes that she found some of her first encounters with one-to-one performance 'discombobulating [...] I hardly knew where to look'.⁵⁸ Some degree of self-awareness, then, is instigated by the very format of the encounter. In a lucid account of his experience of my own one-to-one performance *audience*, blogger Jim Jepps points out that this heightened self-consciousness also derives from a confusion about the social conventions operating in this situation, a 'crisis of expectation' that suggests a sense of a requirement to 'perform' without knowing the rules.⁵⁹

Peggy Phelan suggests that the performer's attention leads us to a more profound engagement with ourselves that is instantiated by this face-to-face encounter (and in the case of one-to-one performance, this may be precisely what spectators, consciously or unconsciously, are seeking). Phelan argues that

⁵⁶ Zerihan, 'Intimate inter-actions'.

⁵⁷ Ridout, *Stage Fright*, p. 70. It is of course significant that Ridout's moment of self-consciousness arises precisely out of this sense of being *alone* in the focus directed on him.

⁵⁸ Gardner, 'I didn't know'.

⁵⁹ Jim Jepps, 'Raucous silence', blog post 29 April 2007, <<http://jimjay.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Art>> [accessed 24 April 2014].

all performance spectation is re-enacting Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': '[t]he desire to see is a manifestation of the desire to be seen, in live performance as well as in the spectator's relation to inanimate representation [...] Seeing the other is a form of social self-representation.'⁶⁰ If this is true for all performance, how much more might it be so in the one-to-one, with its opportunity for face-to-face interaction with the other, where the sense of being seen is likely to be at the centre of the spectator's experience. But here it is not just *social* self-representation that is at stake, for what is played out is the infant's recognition of itself in the face of the other, or as Lévinas would have it, the subject's self-realisation in her/his recognition of the responsibility that is the very condition of subjectivity. This also helps to clarify the claims to 'intimacy' that are made for such performance: while many factors militate against an intimate *exchange* or *interaction*, the spectator has the potential to find what psychoanalytic theory suggests we are actually seeking in our quest for intimacy: the true object of love 'may really be the loving subject, a self we lovingly recover at the very moment we may wish to celebrate our openness to the world. [...] We love only ourselves (as Lacan puts it more concretely, [...] "I love only my body, even when I transfer this love onto the body of the other")'.⁶¹ In the intensity of the one-to-one performance, the spectator seeks a return to her-self, a regathering of a subjectivity dissipated in the illusory relationships of spectacle. We return in fact to the original sense of the 'intimate', an engagement with what is most private and personal, most internal to oneself. And indeed, as Ridout argues, it may be that the awkward self-consciousness reported by spectators is in fact crucial to the effect of the one-to-one. Without the risk of self-exposure, self-recognition remains superficial or anodyne:

If self-recognition is the pleasure that we gain [from the theatrical face to face], then some degree of self-disclosure is the price to be paid for it, and there is a particular pleasure in that very expenditure. Without it,

⁶⁰ Phelan, pp. 18-21.

⁶¹ Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 72-76.

the self-recognition comes free, and yields, perhaps, a little less enjoyment.⁶²

Lyn Gardner doesn't know where to look: in this awkward negotiation there is a delicious but perturbing frisson of self-revelation – the possibility that Gardner's gaze might betray (to O'Reilly, and perhaps more shockingly, to herself) a perverse desire aroused by her physical proximity with a naked woman embracing the carcass of a dead animal.

While acknowledgement of this solipsistic focus might take us back to the absence that Phelan suggests is at the heart of the performance, and to our own ultimate solitude, it can paradoxically offer the comfort of knowing ourselves not alone in our predicament: 'what is presented as the failure of communication in love constitutes precisely the positivity of the relationship; this absence of the other is precisely its presence as other'.⁶³ For as noted above, Lévinas argues that the awareness of subjectivity that arises through the encounter with the other derives not from the sense of being seen, but rather through the realisation of responsibility for the other. *Pace* Lacan, it is not the mirror image of self that the subject encounters, but rather the exposure to the other who demands response.⁶⁴

We might, indeed, go further and posit, following Nancy, that what one-to-one performance effects for both spectator and performer is an essential affirmation of one's own present-ness in the world:

Sense begins where presence is not pure presence, but breaks apart to be itself as such. That 'as' presupposes distance, space and the sharing of presence. The very concept of 'presence' contains the necessity of this division. Pure, unshared presence, presence to nothing, of nothing,

⁶² Ridout, *Stage Fright*, p. 79.

⁶³ Lévinas, *Temps*, p. 89.

⁶⁴ And as Peter Sloterdijk points out, 'humans have faces not for themselves, but for others'; the idea that subjectivity emerges from the face-to-face because the infant perceives a (mirror) image of him/herself rests on the misguided notion of visual reflection as a universal of human experience, rather than a relatively recent innovation. Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, vol. 1: *Bubbles – Microspherology*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), pp. 192-193.

for nothing, is neither present nor absent: a simple, traceless implosion, leaving no trace, of a being who will never have *been*.⁶⁵

In the light of increasing mediatised distancing of social contact, the 'intimacy' that appears to be so prized in one-to-one performance might be not just physical proximity to the other, but confirmation of the self's very *existence*. We need one another not just as a mirror to our being, but in order to exist at all: 'the *with* is the – singular plural – condition of presence in general as co-presence.'⁶⁶ Nancy, indeed, suggests that the shifting meanings of the word 'intimacy' itself emerge from this necessity of otherness to selfhood:

If intimacy is to be defined as the extreme of coincidence with self, then what is more interior than intimacy is the gap of the coincidence itself: it is the co-existence of the origin 'in' itself, that is a co-existence of origins – and it is no accident that we use the word 'intimacy' to designate a relationship among several more often than a relationship with self.⁶⁷

And in his development of the situationist analysis of the 'society of the spectacle', Nancy suggests powerful reasons for the need to re-establish the intimate sense of self, and hence perhaps for the particular attraction of one-to-one performance in the contemporary moment. In a society where representation is currency, imagination has been appropriated and is sold back to the subject in imaginary form; the individual becomes a 'subject of representation – that is, a subject reduced to the sum or the flux of representations he buys – [who] takes the place and the role of a subject of being and of history.'⁶⁸ The lure of the one-to-one, then, might derive from the urge to escape this echoing hall of mirrors, to find co-existence, and hence authentic subjectivity, in the company of an other.

⁶⁵ Nancy, *Être*, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Nancy, *Être*, p. 60.

⁶⁷ Nancy, *Être*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Nancy, *Être*, p. 70.

The situationists' solution to the contemporary predicament lies in 'the free creation of "situation": the appropriating event removed, in the moment, from the logic of spectacle.'⁶⁹ Although as I have argued above unrehearsed spontaneity is by no means guaranteed in one-to-one performance, the spectator's sense of the potential for creative input into the 'situation' (often reinforced by an active participation solicited from her) may similarly contribute to its attraction, enhancing her awareness of being-present-with the performance.

The safely managed risk of Pinchbeck and Dobkin's work, and of many other one-to-one performances, opens a contained space where the spectator may engage with personal responses to powerful experience – bereavement, shameful desires or secrets, witnessing the pain of another – and perhaps come face to face with aspects of herself that habitually go unremarked or even repressed.⁷⁰ At the same time, however, it would appear to preclude the possibility of any genuine access to the other, reinforcing the absolute alterity indicated by Lévinas. Beyond the external barriers to genuine 'intimacy' that may be put in place by performer, context, performance economy and sociocultural expectations, beyond those I consciously and/or unconsciously set up myself, I come up against the utter unknowability of the other in front of me, the wall of the other's face, and find I am forced to fall back on myself, to engage with the resonance of this encounter within me. In such encounters, it must ultimately be myself that I come to meet.

Like Lévinas, Luce Irigaray posits the other with whom we come face to face as the absolutely unknown: none is more other to us than the fellow-human we are confronted with. In the total familiarity with our own being, our own perceptions and thoughts, we are confronted with the impossibility of knowing another's experience, another's body-mind, however close our relationship or

⁶⁹ Nancy, *Être*, p. 70.

⁷⁰ This risk management includes the management of physical risk: part of the unspoken contract in O'Reilly's performance, for example, is surely that spectators may be confident that whether or not they choose to inflict physical damage on her skin, she will ultimately maintain responsibility for her bodily integrity,

long our acquaintance: 'What the other is, who the other is, I never know.'⁷¹ For Irigaray, the paradigmatic case of this difference is the encounter between male and female: 'the other who is forever unknowable to me is the other who differs sexually from me.'⁷² Dobkin's *Fee for Service* offers a frank articulation of this hermetic boundary between 'sexually different' individuals: the spectator, however gendered, takes on the 'male' role, but in penetrating the female 'interior' encounters a mask, a prosthesis that distances her/him further from the other with whom she/he is 'intimately' engaged. For Nancy, this fundamental otherness is yet more profound, and emerges from our very self-hood, our being each the origin of our own world: 'You are absolutely unknown because the world begins *in its turn with you*.'⁷³ This being so, the encounter with another is indeed an encounter with another world, and fundamentally a source of wonder at the unknown before us.

The meeting of other and same

Notwithstanding the promises of intimate encounter with which one-to-one performance is frequently promoted, the arguments of Irigaray and Nancy point up the emptiness of the claim that physical proximity and exclusive access make possible a different kind of relationship between performer and spectator, suggesting rather that such close encounter might reinforce the alienness of the other in front of us. And indeed, consideration of the socioeconomic parameters and the inter- and intra-subjective negotiations of one-to-one performance highlights the barriers to genuine knowledge of the other that are necessarily present. While it may indeed offer the possibility of an engagement with the inner being of the self, then, the one-to-one, rather than making place for a meeting of interiorities, can emphasise the essentially bounded subject and the primacy of difference. This other becomes not a fellow-being but a manifestation of otherness.

⁷¹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 20.

⁷² Irigaray, *Éthique* p. 20.

⁷³ Nancy, *Être*, p. 24.

This suggests performance, and the one-to-one in particular, as a solipsistic exercise on the part of the performer, and an experience of isolation for the spectator. But perhaps this need not be the case. While sharing of one's innermost being is at some level impossible, Irigaray's further argument suggests that this very experience of alienness is enabled by a primal sharing, a commonality that underlies all difference. This is the commonality she posits as the 'same' from which the subject emerges, preceding the subject's knowing of herself as subject, as difference – the primordial substance that is the 'ground of any possibility of determining identity'.⁷⁴ And the other also emerges from this 'same', '[the] Other cannot exist unless he draws his substance, the texture of his horizon, the emergence of his other-world, from the same. This Other would else be so other that we could have no conception of him.'⁷⁵ The 'same' forms the ground of possibility for a new kind of relationship emerging precisely from this profound (sexual) difference, a radical openness that allows both subject and other to *be*, but to be in the slippery uncertainty of the unknown, the space between.

Nancy contends that separation is essential in order for there to be contact: 'from one singular to the other there is contiguity, but without continuity. There is proximity, but to the extent where the extreme of closeness emphasises the gap from which it is excavated.'⁷⁶ The other, who gives us meaning, is a different origin. But in Irigaray's terms, this is to make the mistake of Heidegger, who 'forgets' the air within which his 'clearing' is created.⁷⁷ The origin, each origin, emerges from the 'same' that is always already there, giving birth to us and mediating our encounters with these other origins. Irigaray's reading of the 'same' resonates with her exploration of the maternal air, and our similar forgetting of it. The air is the womb that, following birth, continually brings us forth, enveloping and nourishing us collectively, a

⁷⁴ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 98.

⁷⁵ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 97.

⁷⁶ Nancy, *Être*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Irigaray, *L'oubli de l'air*. I consider Irigaray's analysis of the air as maternal medium in more depth in the following chapter.

universally shared substance. In *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, she suggests that mucus, a similarly uncontainable and enveloping substance, is the medium through which we come most directly into engagement with the other's interior, the condition of our contact with one another through the air (both in breath and in language) and in intercorporeal relations, 'serving love, breath, song, without ever being grasped as such.'⁷⁸ Mucus is, indeed, our primordial medium, the interface with the actual womb in which we first come into existence, and into contact with the other – a mediation that is transferred to the air after birth. And within the universal containment of the air, mucus offers the betweenness that allows us to engage with the other 'same' (air, other being).

If, as Irigaray posits, the common matter, the 'same' which precedes all difference, is the only basis on which we can recognise the Other, any address to the Other must take place in and with, and subject to the acknowledgement of, the medium which allows it to arise:

In order to have an intuition of the other that is neither projective nor self-centred, one must be capable of infinite intuition

- either that of a god or divine principle assisting the birth of the other without constraining it through one's own desire
- or that of a subject who, in each moment of the present, remains unfinished and open to a future of the other that is neither purely passive nor purely active.⁷⁹

The first position here would be that of the ideal Lévinasian subject, infinitely open to the other without concern for self. Regarded in the light of Irigaray's articulation of the 'same' that is forever forgotten, however, Lévinas' position appears decidedly masculinist, suggesting that the subject should adopt the position of radical self-abnegation which is already assigned to the maternal air (*L'oubli de l'air*) or the 'same' (*Éthique de la différence sexuelle*). Abasing the

⁷⁸ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 108.

⁷⁹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, pp. 108-109.

self before the other is a choice available only to the one already constituted as subject, and perpetuates the forgetting of the containing medium in which this encounter takes place – a negation of the self that is the position always already assigned to the feminine in patriarchal society. Irigaray's ethics eschew Lévinas' self-abnegation in favour of an arguably more difficult-to-grasp continual mutual exploration of the space between. Her suggestion of relationship as a mixing, a meeting within matter in which the substance of self engages with the substance of the other, via a material medium, goes beyond Merleau-Ponty's chiasmus, the intertwining between subject and world in perception. The relationship Irigaray proposes is more material, fleshly – yet neither entirely of my flesh nor of the other's. Intersubjectivity, for Irigaray, is a relationship *in* matter, not a meeting of bounded bodied subjects.⁸⁰ In our meeting with another 'origin', wonder also resides in the unique otherness of the 'same' with which we come face to face, skin to skin, breath to breath – a world that is recognisably of the same stuff yet entirely different from our own. Irigaray contrasts Merleau-Ponty's segregated, visual engagement with the intrauterine world, in which neither viewed nor viewer yet exists, a unified, non-dichotomised flesh in which two subjects are nevertheless mutually distinguishable. Proposing mucus as the material constituting principle of the genuinely non-hierarchical, non-dialectical relationship with the other (specifically, the sexual other), she suggests that it could offer a radical alternative to gendered dichotomies of difference:

mucus perhaps represents what might allow the completion or the overturning of the dialectic. The transparency of the concept might be

⁸⁰ For Merleau-Ponty, the viewer must first *be* a body in order to apprehend the material world, to engage with its substance visually (Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible*, p. 176). There is, then, already a constituted subject. For Irigaray by contrast, the subject emerges from this undifferentiated fluid flesh, finding its place in a material, maternal medium. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty uses the *metaphor* of the lips – 'the two sketches of which [the body] is made, its two lips: the sensing mass of which it is made and the mass of the to-be-sensed within which it is born through separation, and to which, as viewer, it remains open' (Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible*, p. 177), but does not address the ontology of the lips themselves, uniting toucher and touched in the flesh rather than in consciousness, as Irigaray does. His 'lips', indeed, remain distinct from one another, whereas for Irigaray they share a common way of being in their separateness. I consider this materiality of relationship with other and with world in further detail in Chapter 3.

countered by the non-transparency, or the other *transparency* of mucus. Never simply available, never simple matter ready to hand or other tool, for the completion of the work. And at the same time, impossible to deny.⁸¹

In order to be truly open to the other, we need first to acknowledge the 'same' within which our relationship emerges, and to accept the impossibility of tying it down conceptually or binding it within our own subjecthood. And although the other's *inner experience* (both sensory and reflexive) is fundamentally closed to us, Irigaray suggests that we may meet in this fluid, mucous slipperiness in a way that connects us back to the intrauterine environment – the other's body and our own indistinguishable, both self and world because prior to subjecthood. In the shimmering betweenness that is the relation of lip to lip, of body to body, there is a possibility of coming into a not-knowing, or a pre-knowing, that temporarily effaces the distinction between self and world. At the boundary of the skin, the breathing, open/closed membrane that forms our interface with the world, self and other mingle, as Michel Serres suggests, giving rise to a 'confusion' that he promotes as in fact a deeper form of knowing, and the path to an authentic sense of self:

I am, I exist in this mixed contingency that changes, changes again through the storm that is the other, through the possibility of his or her existence. We throw each other off balance, we are at risk.⁸²

The co-existence with the unknowable other that, according to Nancy, is the condition of my own being, throws me into this dangerous instability but by the same token brings me into a continually emerging knowing of my self and my world. As Irigaray suggests, it might in fact be possible to acknowledge our difference and still to meet in a fleshly chiasmus. The fact that structural, social and personal limitations often prevent one-to-one performance from opening up this charged space of unknowing speaks to its inherence within the

⁸¹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 108.

⁸² Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 26.

economy of spectacle, but by no means forecloses any possibility of more radically risky encounter. And Irigaray's articulation of the meeting in the flesh suggests that the continuing attraction of the form for many spectators might speak to a desire to engage with this potentiality of the visceral, going beyond the closed loop of the visual in more distanced theatrical 'spectacle' to a physical proximity that holds the possibility of inhabiting this flesh-fluid boundary zone – and may already open it through the physical emanations of presence (the smell of a body, the waft of breath from a whisper in the ear) or the direct approach of touch.

If one-to-one performance is to offer interpersonal intimacy, then, if it is to bring into being an encounter with the other who is of the same (rather than a self-identification of the subject faced with a similarly self-identified subject), it needs to engage this slippery substance of the inbetween, recognise it as ground and allow for uncertainty, instability, an emergence as yet uncontained in language.

Negotiating the between

In April 2010 I book my place at Battersea Arts Centre's inaugural 'One-on-one' festival. The evening promises a programme of varied one-to-one encounters throughout the BAC building, with an individual menu created from a combination of the spectator's (pre-booked) choices and experiences that are freely available through the evening. Over the three hours, in a variety of rooms, corridors and foyers, I watch a drag artist miming for me atop a growing pile of dresses (Thom Shaw, Drag Mountain), receive a personally cut, polished and stamped slice of an ancient oak beam (Barnaby Stone, A Little Bit of a Beautiful Thing), jump around a room for a minute attempting to glimpse the face of a performer who persistently turns his back to me (Face Game, artist unknown), make a solemn promise for 'my country' (the Kings of England's I Vow to Thee My Country), sit in a room on my own (Franko

B's somewhat tongue-in-cheek You Me Nothing), and am gently soaped and rinsed in a bath, towelled off and held across the performer's lap as he offers me chocolate (Adrian Howells' The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding). Notwithstanding the programme's promise of intimate experience, as noted above this kaleidoscopic series of encounters, together with the inevitable surrounding busy-ness and periodic anxiety about timetables, results in my predominant sense being one of detached observation of the relations being played out.

In the event it is in an unscheduled, unexpected encounter that I experience my most direct contact with the stranger opposite me. I have not booked for Rotozaza's Etiquette, which takes place in the foyer just off the main staircase, and it is only by chance that I pass when another spectator couple have not turned up and there is space free for myself and the middle-aged white man who has appeared at the same time. A black-clad performer? usher? seats us opposite one another at a small table, informs us that we are to put on headphones and follow the instructions we hear, and leaves. The table holds a flat blackboard with lamp alongside, and each of us has a row of small figurines, a piece of chalk, and a notebook on one side. When the first instruction comes over the headphones, I immediately turn up the volume on the sound pack, unable to hear it over the general noise in the echoing foyer. My companion appears similarly discomfited, and it takes us a few moments before we begin to respond to our instructions. It becomes apparent that we hear only our own: mine include moving the figure of a woman onto and around the 'stage', adding other figurines from time to time, and repeating lines of dialogue that appear to respond to those spoken by my companion. Sound effects, and occasional lines of dialogue over the headphones, coincide with the gestures we are asked to make (my companion points to the table as I hear a man's voice say 'This is the stage'). Sometimes we are brought into direct physical engagement – holding hands, nodding or smiling at the other. We seem to be enacting

a scene from a play, an exchange of some kind between a man and a woman, though my (and apparently, my companion's) intermittent failure to hear the instruction leaves gaps in my understanding of what might be going on. (My sense is of some 19th-century realist drama – Ibsen, perhaps.) Our instructions sometimes alternate to create dialogue or exchanges of movement, sometimes seem to come together (though again, my timing at least is often influenced by the moment it takes me to understand what I have just heard). Occasionally we say the same thing at the same time. By the end of the encounter, when I am instructed to remove the headphones, and I and my companion thank each other and move away, I feel little the wiser about what has been played out on the 'stage' between us.

But that something has played out in the space between us is clear: I have a sense of this being by a long way the closest I have got to intimacy (either with myself or with another) during this evening. Through the combination of actual physical engagement and enacting the scene on the 'stage', I have an unnerving sense of raw exposure to a stranger, of a closeness that has been mirrored by, rather than echoing, that enacted in the script and by the figurines. I also have a strong sense of having shared something unique with my companion – our struggle to grasp and follow our instructions, our mutual bewilderment as we occasionally stare at each other, speechless, when we are at a loss to make them out, speaks of a concerted effort to make something happen together, between us. In contrast to the evening's other encounters, where my experience has been guided and shaped by the performer, I have a much stronger sense of agency (despite the fact that this is the most rigidly structured encounter of the evening) – and indeed a desire to 'make it happen'. This contrasts with my desire in other encounters, where I am aware of an urge to in some way satisfy or please the performer, to play my part correctly, and thus feel somewhat coerced.

There is almost a sense of trying to survive – this is a ‘sink or swim’ we are thrown into. If we ‘fail’ in our striving, this performance, to which we have committed as participants/spectators, will not exist (though of course the very engagement we find ourselves in constitutes the performance experience, and in this sense it is hard to see what would constitute failure. The scenario we are attempting to enact is merely the conceit, the frame on which our relationship is built). There is a sense of commitment and responsibility to the other that differs from the responsibility I feel in many of the other pieces – to ‘behave’ as a spectator, to gratify the performer with, if not appreciation, at least a semblance of engagement. Here neither of us can depend on an omniscient, omnipotent performer to make the interaction ‘work’, and to keep us safe: we have only one another to cling to.

This sense of slippery uncertainty, a shifting sea of interaction where I can have no expectation of direction or outcome, might come closer to Irigaray’s proposal for a relationship that truly acknowledges the other, remaining open in order to incorporate (but not subsume) the fluid medium that makes the relationship possible. If we acknowledge the medium within which we relate, the ‘same’ in which our two ‘othernesses’ arise, we may begin to recognise our commonality. But our relationship can never be taken for granted, constantly being renegotiated through the slippery, shifting substance within which it emerges. In my undefined encounter with a ‘stranger’, framed by the parameters of the script, and of the venue and event, but at some level ours to create, I find something of this uncertainty of role, this exploration of what there in fact is, and is becoming, between us rather than the prescribed identities that might be suggested by the framework of the interaction. In this public setting we are far from Irigaray’s shared inhabiting of bodily secretion, no doubt each largely maintaining our learned and adapted socially determined identities as well as the conventional boundaries of subject. But the circumstances of our meeting offer a small space for exploring what such a relationship might involve.

It is no accident that this uncertainty draws me fully into present-ness – the self-consciousness of ‘performing’ for the other, but also the immediate moment of striving. What I do and say matters here: I am not one of a number being passed through the conveyor belt of a serial performance. My engagement makes a difference not only to my own experience but also to that of my co-participant. Moreover, my sense that we are on an equal footing, that he has no more control over the script or structure of our encounter than I, suggests to me a greater degree of agency than I experience in the other one-to-ones I have encountered in this evening (including those where I am asked for a personal contribution). This equality of status further contributes to my sense of an experience genuinely shared, each of us similarly invested in groping to shape and make sense of our encounter. While my partner in unknowing remains other to me (and indeed, I have no more sense of ‘who he is’ at the end of our ten-minute interaction than when we first met – we exchange no personal information, simply thank each other and walk away), there is in our shared predicament a sense of fellow-feeling. And despite our anonymity, I also leave with a clear sense of having been *seen*, by a witness for whom this is (as far as I know) not just one more iteration of an encounter he has designed himself, but a unique, singular event shared only with me.⁸³

In the space of confusion opened up by Rotozaza’s *Etiquette*, what arises for me is an almost agonising sense of my own presence, the inescapable awkwardness of being here with this other, trying to *make sense*. I meet my own version of Jim Jepps’ ‘crisis of expectations’. But I also have a powerful

⁸³ It is worth saying that this is not necessarily precisely the experience designed by the company. One of the reasons I had not reserved a slot for this performance was that it could only be booked by two people at a time, suggesting it as an experience for couples, or friends (though in other iterations spectators have been given the opportunity to engage with a stranger: see Rotozaza, ‘*Etiquette*’, <<http://www.rotozaza.co.uk/etiquette2.html>> [accessed 11 January 2014]; Melena Ryzik, ‘Urban eye: Theater and pierogies’, *New York Times*, 16 January 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/video/theater/1194817112282/urbaneye-theater-and-pierogies.html>> [accessed 11 January 2014]). Although the piece is made for a social space (it has been presented in cafés and other busy social environments) I wonder, too, whether the noise levels in the foyer are quite what was envisaged, given how hard it is to hear the instructions at times.

sense of in some way sharing this experience, of being together with another in a state of undefinition, where the familiar floor of both social and performance convention has somehow slid out from under our feet – or perhaps not yet quite materialised. In our gravity-less moment, we have only one another to cling to as we seek uneasily to find our ground once more. And while this apparent void may be disconcerting, even terrifying, Nancy suggests that it could offer an ultimately more liberating experience of the meaning of being present. Bereft of anchor, wrenched from the stable ground of habitual social relations, we are pitched into a space where we make sense by and within our togetherness: ‘*We make sense*: not by conferring price, value, but by exposing the absolute value that the world *is* by/in and of itself.’⁸⁴ This encounter certainly represents the most ‘me’ I have felt on this evening. While my interchange with a mild-mannered stranger in the context of this performance evening is hardly the kind of mortal danger evoked by Serres as a moment of absolute self-presence, the uncertainty it provokes, the occasional sense of vertiginous precipice across which we confront one another in our mutual unknowing, brings me into a powerful sense of both presentness and responsibility/response-ability, ‘the predicament of being physically here and now in a historical sense: social, exposed, subjected, disciplined, split’.⁸⁵ Though we each do our best to bridge (or better, cover over) the gap between us, to re-establish conventional ground by conforming to the ‘rules’ of the interaction, there is no obviating the momentary lurch of free-fall I have felt as I am confounded by the (lack of) instruction of how to act in this encounter, or the acute self-consciousness of wanting to make this experience ‘all right’ for the (apparently equally open, anxious, willing) other.⁸⁶

That such direct engagement by no means always transpires speaks to the anxiety that this space of encounter arouses, with its promise/threat of exposure of the self to another self – and yet more troublingly, the possibility of radical

⁸⁴ Nancy, *Être*, p. 22.

⁸⁵ Ridout, *Stage Fright*, p. 76.

⁸⁶ Again, the question of how this interaction might be experienced by other configurations of participants is raised: would a romantically involved couple, or good friends, feel the same level of anxiety and desire to please?

destabilisation that genuine intimacy engenders, and the defensive strategies both participants may employ to offset this. Coupled with the power dynamic operating in the interaction, in which (as noted above) the parameters are determined by the performer and the spectator rarely has the opportunity to initiate other kinds of engagement or mutual exploration, these tend rather to close down the potential for genuinely open encounter. It seems we are a long way from Irigaray's ideal meeting of two equals prepared to open themselves to the slippery groundlessness of the between.

Nevertheless, subjective accounts speak repeatedly of an experience of (comfortably or uncomfortably) close contact with a stranger, of crossing personal boundaries, of going somewhere that other performances do not. As I suggested above, this may well prove to be a deeper or less habitual encounter with the self rather than an entry into the other's interiority. This may be true for the performer/artist (and in the vast majority of cases, the performer *is* the creator of the work) as much as for the spectator – the making of the work evidently generates an opportunity for the performer to engage with a series of individual others. Adrian Howells, one of the most unflinchingly honest exponents of the form in both his work and his reflections on it, commented that his one-to-one work came, at least in part, from his own desire for intimacy: 'I am not so good at letting [intimacy] happen in everyday life, of *having* intimacy without performing. [...] that is one of the reasons I want to make sure I can explore intimacy in performance.'⁸⁷ Such moments of personal closeness may arise when the performer chooses to open the structure of the performance, going beyond the script to engage directly with *this* spectator: as, for example, in Dobkin's performance, where our verbal exchange centres on an apparently spontaneous mutual recognition of shared experience, and my expectations are overcome by a momentary sense of warmth and kinship with her as person rather than as performer.

⁸⁷ Adrian Howells, personal communication, January 2010; Adrian Howells quoted in Johnson, p. 116.

But the intimacy that arises here derives precisely from its unscripted character – it is the unique, unplanned instant of meeting that cannot be programmed into the performance, and where performance itself begins to break its own boundary, overflowing and redoubling itself in the exchange. Such moments partake of the ‘spontaneity’ that Register and Henley identify as one of the key features of the experience of intimacy. Equally, they suggest something unique and special – my sense that Dobkin and I share a private joke, and a small piece of common ground, or that I and my unknown ‘interlocutor’ in *Etiquette*, adrift on our sea of uncertainty, have had no one to cling to but each other, marks these for me as privileged moments unique to me and this other in this moment.

Such apparently spontaneous moments of mutual communication, small tears in the veil of the performance, suggest to the spectator that she is being offered not just a deeper encounter with her own inner world, but also access to some aspect of the other’s private self. As I have argued above, a number of structural factors militate against the possibility of a genuinely intimate interaction, and the physical and psychic labour of repeating a structured encounter with multiple spectators, added to the performer’s responsibility for ‘holding’ the performance frame and the necessary maintenance of psychic boundary, would seem to minimise the potential for the performer to experience such closeness, restricting her to creating a context for the spectator’s self-discovery. Howells articulates this very clearly, noting that while the actions he engages with the participant set up a potentially therapeutic relationship of nurture, this cannot be mutual:

I think the dynamic of nurturing someone else is very different to the dynamic of nurturing someone else and being nurtured in return, at the same time. I used to say that if I was nurturing and nourishing another human being, of course I am going to be nurtured and nourished in return. It’s not necessarily the case. In *The Pleasure of Being* [...]

[they're] not giving back to me at the same time. I experience *something* of a nurturing nature in return, but it's not the same.⁸⁸

I would argue nevertheless that at least part of the attraction of the form for artists is the potential it holds for the performer to make some kind of intimate connection, though it may be of a different order from that experienced by the spectator.

While analysis of spectator experience of one-to-ones has been limited, there are still fewer accounts of performer experience. The responses of artists interviewed by Zerihan for her Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide, as well as Adrian Howells' detailed discussion of his research and practice, offer some glimpses of what the performer may experience during the course of the interaction, but these are tantalisingly few as the artists themselves also focus on their intentions for the work and the anticipated or actual response of their audiences.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, these few performer accounts hint at, and sometimes directly articulate, experiences of intimacy. For O'Reilly, the one-to-one might be 'a disarming of audience (you) *and of artist (I)* by the sharing of a tender moment or a series of moments';⁹⁰ Howells seeks to create an interaction that is 'mutually nourishing and nurturing for both myself and the audience-participant',⁹¹ (though his subsequent reflection makes clear the complexity of realising this intention), and cites one example where he feels privy to 'a bodily confession [...] a different way of listening'.⁹² Leena Kela says that '[as] a

⁸⁸ Howells, quoted in Johnson, p. 115.

⁸⁹ There is nothing unique to one-to-one performance in this: Susan Melrose has pointed out how what is termed 'Performance Studies' can more properly be seen as 'a "closet Spectator Studies" that misrecognises itself as such' (Susan Melrose, 'Confessions of an uneasy expert spectator', <<http://www.sfmelrose.org.uk/>> (2007) [accessed 6 May 2014]). See Rachel Zerihan and others, *Live Art Development Agency Study Room Guide to One to One Performance* LADA Study Room Guide (http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/uploads/documents/SRG_Zerihan_reducedsize.pdf), [accessed 12 May 2014]), Heddon and Howells, and particularly Johnson, for some glimpses into the performer's affective response to one-to-one performance encounters.

⁹⁰ Gardner, 'I didn't know...' (my emphasis).

⁹¹ Zerihan and others, p. 35.

⁹² Heddon and Howells, p. 5.

performer I have managed to feel very intimate with [the spectator]'.⁹³ In my own practice as a maker and performer of one-to-one interactions I certainly have a sense of repetitive labour (not least emotional labour), but I am also repeatedly struck by the unique contribution brought by each spectator, and moved by the aspects of themselves they consciously or involuntarily reveal. The interlude that follows reflects in more detail on the place of this work in my practice; to begin with, I consider briefly some of the ethical questions it raises for me as instigator of the interaction.

The responsibility I feel in presenting one-to-one performance is not just to the integrity of the work itself (ensuring that I offer the experience as far as possible in line with my intentions for the piece), but also to the participant who risks him/herself in this encounter. I thus have a double responsibility, of holding the structure of the interaction, but also of holding a safe space for the potential vulnerability of the participant. The first, of course, forms a substantial foundation for the second, but the difference of this kind of 'performance' from others, where I might be presenting real-time actions to be viewed rather than participated in, is that I need to be present not only in the 'action', but also in an openness to receiving the participant's presentness. That this affective labour comes at a cost in terms of energy is undeniable: as I note below, a four-hour session of encounters is an experience of exhausting intensity. The focused commitment to open listening is particularly apparent in the extended engagement of *Talking Matter*, the performance submitted as part of this thesis. But in remaining receptive to all possibilities and allowing the conversation (on both verbal and material levels) to take its course from the participant's reflections as much as my own, this commitment brings the reward of remarkable insights into each new world of experience, each unique way of being, together with a pure wonder at the richness of reflection that can be poured into this small space of encounter.

⁹³ Zerihan and others, p. 46.

I am also aware that as the initiator of the idea, the deviser of the performance and the performer within the interaction, control of the encounter rests largely with me. While in *audience*, for example, my initial marketing (perhaps naively) suggests that intimacy is what is at play, I am not convinced that this is what *I*, as performer, will be experiencing. This raises the question, then, of how much intimacy I can really be offering the participant, given the mutuality understood by most accounts to be a component part of intimacy. Do I reveal as much of myself to them? Is their experience equally of 'intimacy' between us, rather than self-intimacy? The detailed and sometimes lengthy responses in the comments book for that piece do indeed speak of moments of self-recognition of the kind I have discussed above.⁹⁴ But many – including some who testify to feeling anxious or uncomfortable at the outset – are also open to taking in aspects of me that I consciously or unconsciously reveal in our shared silence. Participants write of looking back at me, taking in details of my clothing and face, wanting to know what I am thinking.⁹⁵ Much of the intense affective labour of one-to-one work for me derives from my efforts to offer myself as openly as I can within the performance frame, to remain receptive and thus, to the limited extent possible within the containment I also need to maintain, vulnerable to the destabilising potential of an encounter with the other. Again, Howells, who risked intensely personal material in some of his performances, speaks eloquently of the psychic dangers of this process for the performer, and how he learned to navigate the balance between self-exposure and self-protection.⁹⁶ If I am to engage the openness and presentness I seek to offer, this balance needs to be renegotiated in each successive encounter, a delicate adjustment of just how much openness is right for me, and for the spectator, in this meeting (whether that be the return of a smile, sharing an

⁹⁴ 'Thank you for this opportunity to discover a bit more about myself'; 'I became more aware of my breathing'; 'hyperaware of any little sound I was making'; 'The first time in the day I stopped to think, what am I thinking... this is me, now, here.' (*audience*, comments book, 2005-2013).

⁹⁵ 'You look at details... details of skin, details of shape, details of colours'; 'trying to find out what she is like by looking at her'; 'Questions were in my mind [...] what is she thinking? What can she hear?' (*audience*, comments book).

⁹⁶ Johnson, pp. 117-118.

element of personal history, or a more subtle, bodily-affective giving and receiving).⁹⁷ As performer, just as much as participant, the interaction offers me the opportunity to explore an ethics of mutual openness.

The wonder-ing one-to-one

To the extent that I *am* able to remain open in this way, I offer myself the experience of wonder. The reward for striving towards ethical engagement (which need not be effortful, but needs always to be consciously chosen) is an encounter with the extraordinary and moving detail of the world of the other. If the encounter with the unknown other is destabilising and uneasy, it is also a space of discovery, of venture into the new. As Irigaray points out, wonder arises in our encounter with the other;⁹⁸ conversely, the unknown other is a pre-requisite for wonder.⁹⁹ In Rotozaza's invitation to interact, in which I am confronted with a stranger (not even an identified 'performer') who is moreover 'cast' as other opposite the other (persona) I am to adopt, the space of unknowing is doubled, creating an unsettling openness that likewise makes space for a kind of wonder.¹⁰⁰ If I am prepared to be open to it, I am offered the opportunity not only for wonder at or about my co-participant, but also to marvel at the contingent unfolding of our delicately negotiated situation. Similarly, in *audience*, in setting up and holding a space of engagement with a silent other, my resolve to remain receptive to whatever each participant brings as silence grants me access to minute details of this person, our surroundings,

⁹⁷ This bodily-affective negotiation is particularly apparent in *Handover*, where the central engagement takes place through the exchange of touch between the participant's hand and my own. Through my hand's 'reading' of the other's touch I sense the depth of touch they might be open to receiving from my side, but also have a sense of the extent of what I feel safe giving. See Interlude – Practice (I), below.

⁹⁸ René Descartes, 'De l'admiration', quoted in Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 76.

⁹⁹ While wonder is in no way restricted to the encounter with another human being, another animate being or indeed any entity outside the self (as an infant's rapt absorption in a – to the adult gaze – ordinary plastic key fob, empty carton or its own toes clearly shows), it is always necessarily an encounter with other-ness, a mystery. Indeed, as Sheets-Johnstone suggests, our own bodies are a constant potential source of 'the felt wonder that is part of our living heritage.' Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 290.

¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding popular contemporary use of the term, wonder is by no means always necessarily pleasurable or positive.

and the soundscape which would otherwise pass unnoticed, and returns to me the sense of wonder from which the project sprang¹⁰¹ The reward the piece consistently offers me derives precisely from the unique quality of what each individual reveals – from the more obvious presentations to the subtlest shifts of expression and the details of skin texture, facial structure, spontaneous tics and posture that I would not, in the everyday, feel comfortable contemplating for this length of time.

One-to-one performance in general, inviting the spectator to come together directly with a living, present performer as person (rather than the distanced performer as character, or depersonalised body, of other kinds of spectation), suggests the possibility of a more naked contact with the unknown other – and this is clearly the expectation of many spectators, as well as the aspiration of many artists.¹⁰² In articulating the one-to-one encounter as special or privileged, however familiar the context or restricted the interaction, the form draws attention to the concrete reality of the exchange – bringing one as it were, face to face with the face-to-face, the ‘Mystery’ that is ‘what I myself am not.’¹⁰³ In our day-to-day social interaction we may subconsciously manage or repress this potentially incapacitating confrontation, subsuming the other into the same by assuming identity of experience, or objectifying the other so as to disregard her claims on us. But as Nancy points out the other, even the known other, is always different – from all others, but also from him/herself:

¹⁰¹ As a progression from my series of works based on stillness, and one thread of my ongoing concern in my practice with spaces and phenomena conventionally perceived in terms of absence or lack, *audience* was inspired in large part by the richness of sound to be found in quiet stillness.

¹⁰² Kira O'Reilly, for example, suggests of her *Untitled Action for Bomb Shelter*: ‘Perhaps it's a disarming of audience (you) and of artist (I) by the sharing of a tender moment or a series of moments. [...] Or an unmaking and remaking of what happens between us as we explore the possibilities of where I end and you begin, and what might happen between us if I ask you to do something for me. Or perhaps it's about what happens when we sit for a short while in a space where not a lot happens.’ O'Reilly, quoted in Gardner, ‘I didn't know...’.

¹⁰³ Lévinas, *Temps*, p. 63.

Singular differences [...] are not only 'individual' but infra-individual: it is never Pierre or Marie that I meet, but one or other in such and such a 'form', in such and such a 'state', in such and such a 'mood', etc.¹⁰⁴

Where better, then, to find wonder than in this encounter with a stranger, contained within a frame that is just safe enough for me to open to the possibility of such transformation/disorientation? While in the context of performance this possibility is of course not restricted to the one-to-one, the special circumstance of coming face to face with a singular other's alterity confronts the spectator/participant directly with the question of how to relate to the other. Framing the meeting with the other within the relationship of attention fundamental to performance, it invokes the duty of care in all relations with that which is other to us. Paradoxically, in *Etiquette* the containing frame of the script-prescribed roles, the anxiety to 'perform' well for the other, reopens us to the responsibility thrust upon us by the other, and by the same token offers us the potential for an encounter with the strangeness of both self and other (who am I, in my failure to perform my role correctly? How do I meet this unutterably strange other?).

The potential for some one-to-ones to engender profound reflection on one's own experience and being, evinced in Zerihan's moving account of her participation in *The Garden of Adrian*, suggests one of the ways that this form can reawaken the 'felt wonder that is part of our living heritage'¹⁰⁵. While the interaction of one-to-one performance may be governed by the veil that habitually cloaks our day-to-day social interactions, allowing us to go about relating to others in the world without being paralysed by amazement or overwhelmed by our inescapable responsibility for the other, we are invited at least to be open to new knowledge of our selves, and to the newness of the encounter itself. My experience in *audience* (and in a number of other one-to-ones I have presented subsequently) is that an open engagement with my co-participant exposes me to their profound strangeness, yet at the same time

¹⁰⁴ Nancy, *Être*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 290.

resolves (in the moment of 'settling') into a deep sense of commonality. It is perhaps in this acknowledgement of both absolute difference and shared sameness that something approaching intimacy can arise. Never knowing exactly what the other's experience is, I can only be grateful (and wonder) at the generous response of many who share the experience with me: 'If ten mins [sic] of silence were the way to greet each other, we could discover how beautiful someone is before they speak or before they leave.'¹⁰⁶

The wonder that may emerge through this encounter with the otherness of the other, or of oneself, or the meeting of othernesses, resonates with the 'uniqueness' articulated by Register and Henley, and commonly understood to characterise experiences of intimacy. If wonder is fundamentally a response to the unknown, by definition it excludes repetition of the experience. As I argued above, the repeated iterations of the one-to-one performance would seem to militate strongly against both genuinely shared intimacy and – at least for the performer – the awareness of the new, strange or extraordinary that arouses wonder. For the artist to anticipate that wonder will arise with each one-to-one encounter, or to strive towards it (on her own part or for the participant) would indeed be counter-productive. But my own experience of making and presenting one-to-ones, and the brief glimpses of other artists' experience that are available, suggest that, notwithstanding doubts about the 'genuine-ness' of the encounter, the form holds as much potential for astonishment at the new for the performer as for the spectator.

Thus at its most potent, what one-to-one performance might offer is not only the encounter with the self that allows the spectator to engage more fully, more viscerally with her own present-ness, but also a space of emergent discovery, a shared venture into the unknown of being-together-with. And in the moments of shocked meeting, of the unexpected within this framed encounter, our mutual wonder/ing might find a space to cohabit. Though wonder, as Tallis suggests, is inherently solipsistic, there can be a sense of wondering alongside the other, sharing the ineffability of the moment. While it would be foolish to

¹⁰⁶ *audience*, comments book, 2005.

claim this as a universal feature of the form, one-to-one performance holds the potential for a powerful moment of encounter that both contains and opens the space of wonder. In the interlude that follows I reflect in more depth on my practice in one-to-one performance. I return to the consideration of wonder, and the potential of performance more generally to open a space where wonder can emerge, in my conclusion.

Interlude – Practice (I)

Sharing bodied space

My interest in one-to-one performance first arose out of my desire to create a space where spectator and performer might engage with what *is* in this small moment of structured commonality. Building on previous work that sought to articulate the fine grain of gradual process and the astonishing richness of detail in apparently insignificant moments of being, I began making one-to-one work with *audience* in 2005. In shrinking the distance between performer and spectator/participant, and setting up a relationship of at least numerical parity, my aim was to draw closer to the extraordinary richness of small moments of everyday bodily interaction, but also to point towards the mutual implication of these two bodied beings in performance, as it had first struck me at the Royal Opera House. In this interlude I reflect on my practice in one-to-one performance which, starting with *audience*, has continued since in a series of interactions in which I attempt to create a context for encounter with a present moment of being in body, through a process of exchange. I consider how this practice has developed over time, explore some of the techniques and practices I draw on in offering these interactions, and reflect on how it has fed into my thinking in relation to the nature of presentness and the commonality of being.

2005

I sit in the back seat of a stationary black cab, parked in a suburban front garden. The passenger door on the other side opens, and a man, ushered by a young woman with a clipboard, crouches to enter. As he settles in the seat his large frame appears somewhat cramped in the

small space, and by his evident effort to keep to his side of it, as if respecting my personal space. When the door has closed he glances at me, and I gesture towards the microphone that sits on a box between us. He nods, and I switch on the minidisk recorder on my side of the seat. I settle back into my place with a creak of the leather seat, and for the next ten minutes we sit in silence, with only the outdoor sounds of birdsong, distant voices and cars, and the occasional whirring of the recorder, breath sounds, and once or twice an audible swallow, inside the small space. I keep my gaze steadily on my companion, half-turned towards him though he faces directly forward. My impression is that he is tense or anxious: his breathing seems rapid and shallow, he shifts awkwardly in his seat several times, and occasionally glances over at me but immediately looks away again. Gradually I become aware of an answering heightened tension in myself: I notice that my own breathing is quiet and shallow, that I am striving to move as little as possible, (though occasionally I bend over the recorder to check the display, and once to turn off the fan heater that has automatically switched itself on); I feel a knot in my solar plexus. My thoughts are busy as I attempt to calm myself mentally, to maintain an open and receptive attitude towards my companion. As I do, I find myself wondering at his willingness to subject himself to what is clearly an ordeal, and touched by his determination to see it through. I redouble my efforts to suggest a quiet receptiveness, slowing my breathing, relaxing my gaze as much as possible.

As one of the first iterations of my one-to-one performance *audience*, this event is both typical and unique. Its typicality resides not only in the precise structuring of the encounter, but also in my sense of the affective arc of the interaction – the initial tension, my own varying emotions of anxiety, curiosity, amusement, concern and touched gratitude.¹ Its uniqueness arises from the

¹ This is however one of the few occasions on which I do not have a sense of the mutual settling described in the Introduction. Though he remarks on how short the ten minutes has

very particular sense I have of *this* person, in *this* moment – a particularity that is only further emphasised the more I repeat the performance. In each encounter I am made aware of the unrepeatability of this repeated moment – from the unique physicality and affective energy of each contributor who sits with me to the ranging of my own emotions and physical state through interest, anxiety, boredom, fatigue and deep calm, and the small or larger spontaneous ‘events’ that punctuate each meeting differently (the suppressed cough, the decision to take a drink of water, the irruption of a sudden jubilant shout outside). Before beginning the project, I had perhaps only a dim anticipation of my distinct affective response to each individual I face across the table (or in this case, along the back seat). But through the accumulation of over 150 iterations over the eight years of the project, I find that I have not only a sense of having met many different individuals, but also a sharp image of many of them, a memory of the affective energy of individual encounters, and clear recollection of small incidents within many of these meetings. After long sessions I feel both drained and energised by the emotional intensity of the multiple interactions. And again and again, I find myself profoundly touched by participants’ willingness to expose themselves, to be witnessed in the passivity of listening, unshielded by words and gestures. While my gaze remains on the participant not to scrutinise them but as a way of assuring them that my attention is with them (and participants may or may not choose to engage or hold eye contact), what emerges for me in the quietness is a powerful awareness of personal detail – a slightly off-centre nose, a breathing pattern, fleeting shifts of facial expression that suggest the passage of emotions. I feel I am given privileged access to a raw vulnerability, of the kind generally exposed only in the trust of a close, ‘intimate’ relationship.

This remarkable sense of accumulating not just a series of recordings of silence, but a growing set of powerful personal encounters, did not form part of my expectations for the project when I first developed it. Although the pilot presentations had made me aware of the intensity of the interaction it was not

seemed, my companion does not appear to allow himself to relax until after I switch off the recorder.

until I had presented the project three or four times, in different locations, that I began to be aware of its subtle cumulative effect on me.

My sense of my ethical responsibility towards the participant contributes considerably to the structural boundaries I place around the encounter. It is precisely timed, with an appointment schedule, and participants are greeted by a 'receptionist' outside. They receive an information sheet explaining the form the encounter will take (including the option to end it at any time during the ten minutes); they are asked to sign a contract releasing their silence to me for my collection. My ostensive purpose in setting up this frame is to offer a safe space for the participant to engage in the interaction: the time limit, the awareness that I will not speak until the end of the performance, the contractual relationship that specifies expectations, create a formal structure within which I hope the participant will feel able to engage with something of what it is to be silent with another. But they equally serve to maintain my safety – I can be confident that the participant knows there are 'rules', that they will not expect more than I have planned to give.

audience emerged out of both my preoccupation with the bodied performer-spectator relationship and a developing fascination with spaces and phenomena commonly perceived in terms of absence or lack. Begun a number of years earlier in research centred on stillness, and a series of performances that resulted from it, this investigation explored the infinitely rich world of small detail in such moments – the 'small dance' of the body in stillness, the intricate sound world (including my own sonic contribution) emerging in 'silence' Introduced to the practice of Deep Listening,² I discovered that, like sitting or standing in stillness, this attentive, accepting listening brought me into a sense of my own being-in-the-world. The choice of the one-to-one format was initially predicated on the idea of a contractual exchange that gave a formal value to silence: having signed a contract releasing their silence for the

² The practice was developed by composer Pauline Oliveros, as 'a way of listening in every possible way to everything possible, to hear no matter what you are doing.' See Center for Deep Listening, 'About Deep Listening', <<http://www.deeplisting.rpi.edu/about-deep-listening/>> [accessed 4 July 2017].

project, the participant offers it in a face-to-face encounter, and in return receives a recording of this and other ten-minute silences. But while this remained as a central principle of the project, what emerged in the actual encounters was a personal interaction that, for me at least, was often intensely moving (and responses in the comments book suggest that it was also a powerful experience for many participants). For those ten minutes, each participant seemed to offer something of themselves for witnessing – in some cases with considerable trepidation.³ After each session of meetings, I came away with strong impressions of all participants, and many of these encounters stay with me years afterwards.

Just as the work with stillness was not aiming at fixed immobility, in *audience* the focus was not on striving at all costs to maintain an absolute absence of sound, but rather on allowing the small sounds of being to be present and heard – shifts of weight, swallowing, the breath once again – alongside, and on an equal level with, the ambient sounds of the building, city, and other people outside the space (depending on the venue). I was open to whatever the participant chose to bring as silence: while for many this was a commitment not to speak or make noise (a sudden cough or inadvertent scrape of their chair often provoking an apologetic glance), some chose to engage in their own ‘silent’ activity – reading or meditating for example. More startlingly, one wept through most of the encounter, though they assured me afterwards they had not been in distress; another sat quietly for some minutes before unexpectedly speaking out loud – entirely unwittingly, as they explained later: they hadn’t realised until they did so that they were speaking aloud.

In its invitation to listen to silence, *audience* carries obvious echoes of John Cage’s 4’33” and *Lectures on Silence*. But my reason for creating this work in fact has more to do with opening up a space of listening to what is between two individuals who have in some way committed to interacting with one

³ The contributor in the interaction described above wrote afterwards: ‘This is an extraordinary and intense experience. One that started, for me, around two weeks ago when I signed up – and I have been petrified ever since. [...] Very frightening, very intense, but definitely not RELAXING!’ *audience*, comments book, 2005.

another without sound – the shifting and mingled openness and resistance to engagement, anxiety and curiosity, avoidance strategies and subversion,⁴ honesty and generosity this commitment brings with it. Part of my work in presenting the piece is a commitment to striving to remain open to the other in front of me – and the more I am able to do so, the more I am repeatedly struck by the uniqueness of each contributor, a powerful sense of the singular person I am sitting with.

And in all of this, while the conceit of the contract and the recording of the interaction framed silence as the central element, I was interested in how the situation might enable the participant to come into a sense of their own being in this particular space, with me, in this particular moment. Of the many, often extensive, responses in the comments book for the piece, one of those that spoke most clearly to my intention was the participant who articulated their simple realisation at one point in the ten minutes that ‘This is me, now here.’ As in the moment of coming to rest evoked in the Introduction above, it seemed to me that here, the piece itself arrives at its destination.

Although this moment of ‘settling’ is one that I have experienced repeatedly over the time I have been presenting this project, it is one that continues to evoke a sense of arrival for me (and is perhaps one of the reasons I have been able to continue repeating the presentation without feeling it has lost any sense of life). I can never be certain that it will arrive (though I have to some extent come to expect it, or at least not be surprised that it does); if it does, I can never be certain when that will be (and therefore it always takes me by surprise. I have never timed it, but have had a sense of it arriving earlier or later in the session). But more than this, I still find that I do not completely know *what* it is, what precisely gives me the sense of settling, being present, and the sense that the contributor has arrived in a similar place. All I can say is that it is at this

⁴ In fact very few of the (obviously self-selected) contributors adopt such avoidance strategies or attempt to subvert the performance: of the over 150 contributors so far, two have spent the time reading, one appeared to be meditating; one attempted to communicate through gesture, and one was clearly trying to make me laugh. While others have appeared shy or nervous, they have, in my perception, remained engaged throughout the ten minutes and at least occasionally made eye contact, acknowledging the interaction.

moment that I sense most profoundly the gift that the contributor is making of her/his presence, and that this is something beyond what I could expect from the premises of the interaction.

The first time I experienced this moment, I was struck by the release of the high levels of tension (both my own and, it seemed, that of the contributor) that I had anticipated, and which had indeed been apparent. The moment of settling was alone sufficient to offer me a glimpse of something new, a gap opening in what I felt I knew about the situation. As the experience was repeated over many iterations of the interaction, I became more accustomed to it. What nevertheless remained for me a source of wonder throughout the years of this project, which toured to many different locations in different countries, was that I had this sense of a settling together *almost every time* I sat opposite a contributor. That this is my own experience of the performance, and may not tally with that of the contributor, goes without saying. But comments received after the 'interview' suggest that many contributors do indeed experience a moment of dropping into calm, letting go into the present moment of the shared silence.⁵

Notwithstanding my concern to hold the space and structure of the interaction, this work proved to be as much an experience of heightened awareness of presentness for me as I hoped it might be for the participant. Above and beyond my commitment to remain attentive and gently focused on the participant, the uniqueness of my encounter with each individual brought me back again and again to my own being in the space with them – not only the small adjustments to my posture and gaze, a readiness to return a smile or acknowledge a rueful apologetic glance, but also my affective response to this

⁵ See, for example, Charles Darwent's review in *The Wire*: 'Faced with a need for perfection, these imperfections [the intrusion of personal and ambient sound into silence] seemed appalling: the phrase "awkward silence" might have been coined for the ten minutes I spent with Gomme. And then, strangely, things did fall silent, although the silence was synaesthetic rather than actual. The [...] room suddenly seemed preternaturally ordered, everything in it – tapes, mics, lines on the floor – remarkably as they should be. Things that had never moved were shown to be still. Gomme's unachievable silence achieved something else: a plastic quietness, a small echo of Plato.' Charles Darwent, 'Rachel Gomme: *audience*: a collection of silences', *The Wire* 266 (2006), 81-82.

person and its resonance in my muscle tension, breathing, level of alertness. I frequently found myself strongly moved by these encounters and what the participant chose (consciously or not) to share of themselves. The silence became a kind of mutual gift (as other responses in the comments book indicated).

What emerged for me was increasingly what it was to sit with another person, quietly taking in their being, their presentness, and sensing what this sharing of bodily presence brought to my sense of my own being. Not the least part of this was the contingency of my presentness, which was inevitably coloured by an infinite variety of happenings and circumstances, from the temperature in the room to engagement with front-of-house staff, to how well I had slept the night before. On some days, fatigue and the accumulation of affective concentration involved in the performance meant that I had to make some effort to continue to offer an open welcoming, rather than shutting into myself; on others, I was hypersensitive to outside sounds and anxious about the participant's experience; on many others I was intrigued and often delighted by the succession of individuals I spent this short space of time with. My strategies for maintaining the openness I wished to offer were largely rooted in meditative practices of self-witnessing: paying attention to my physical sensations of comfort or discomfort, remaining aware of my affective state and allowing space for moments of boredom or irritation, and focusing on the physiological half-opennesses of breathing and cellular motility that connected me to the outside.⁶ Sensing, and holding, my own presentness was part of my responsibility toward the participant who allowed me to witness theirs, a practical ethics of a present relationship rather than simply a performance or rehearsal of one.

Paying attention to my physical sensations also leads me to make conscious adjustments. If I sense tension or nervousness in the participant, I may observe an answering tension in myself, a slight tightening of my shoulders, a shallowing of my breathing. Aware that my physicality will be instantly and

⁶ I discuss these aspects of the sense of open presentness in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

subtly communicative to the participant, with each person I make a conscious effort to engage a bodily openness, a receptiveness based not just in a relaxed posture and open gaze, but in a deeper engagement with an easy breathing, and an awareness of the continual ‘breathing’ activity at cellular level.⁷ In the moment of ‘settling’ described above, I sense my own release of muscle tension and quieting of breathing almost as a shift in gravity, an increased density of shared presence. There is a sense of coming into resonance with one another, and I am reminded of the physiological fact that the electromagnetic impulses of the heart can be registered by another without direct touch:⁸ in this proximity, our affective response to one another and the situation is received and read at this level. (Again, the comments book offers evidence of deeply felt affective responses in many cases.)

The physicality of this exchange of the apparently intangible (silence) led me, as I developed further one-to-one performances, to consider how I might bring to the fore the sense of bodily exchange in all our being-with. We live in, and *are*, a continuum of ever-shifting matter, constantly coming and going between ourselves and the world, our selves and other selves. My subsequent one-to-one performances *Handover*,⁹ centred on an exchange of touch that produced a merged handprint, and *Mouth to Mouth*,¹⁰ in which participants offer their breath in exchange for another’s, engaged more directly with the fluid intermingling of beings, bodies and world. The latter piece, which was partly informed by thinking and research around breathing, air and breath (the subject of detailed reflection in the next chapter), inscribes the cycling of breath and air in the context of a temporal gift economy, inviting reflection on

⁷ ‘Cellular breathing’ is the name given in Body-Mind Centering to the constant opening and closing of cell walls as they take in nutrients and expel waste products and toxins. See Hartley, *Wisdom*, pp. 10, 33.

⁸ Rollin McCraty, Mike Atkinson, Dana Tomasino and William A Tiller, ‘The electricity of touch: Detection and measurement of cardiac energy exchange between people’, in: Karl H. Pribram (ed.) *Brain and Values: Is a Biological Science of Values Possible?* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1998), pp. 359-379.

⁹ *Handover*, first performed at The Others, London; touring UK 2011-. See documentation in Appendix 1a, ‘Handover documentation’ and outline in Appendix 1b.

¹⁰ *Mouth to Mouth*, first performed at Siobhan Davies Studios, London; touring UK and internationally, 2012-. See documentation in Appendix 1a, ‘Mouth to Mouth documentation’, and outline in Appendix 1b.

the ethics of responsibility not only in the one-to-one interaction, but for and with the other beings of our world – an ethics that operates on a profoundly material level.

Talking Matter,¹¹ the work I offer as part of the present submission, once again engages with this fluid materiality by suggesting how the material is, as much as language, the medium of our communication with one another and the root of our learning of ourselves and the world.

Starting with *audience*, a key part of my focus in all of my one-to-one work is on maintaining engagement with my own presence in the present moment, as one way of ensuring that I remain open to the participant's presence and the engagement they offer. In one-to-one work in particular, the sense of gift goes beyond the content of the interaction to encompass the performance itself, the mutual gift of attention making space for each of us to see and sense ourselves, as I argued above. It is in part through this extended investigation of *how* I myself come to feel present, and remain present to the other, that I have increasingly become concerned with opening a space that invites and holds such awareness.

In the chapter that follows I consider how the commonality of being I seek to open space for in this work is articulated materially through a durational performance that centres on breath, inviting reflection on the intimately individual, yet universally shared, process of breathing, and an awareness of both individual and collective presentness that holds, and is held by, the shared medium of the air.

¹¹ *Talking Matter*, first presented at Siobhan Davies Studios, London; touring UK, 2013-.

Chapter 2

Phases of matter: The forgetting and remembering of the air

One-to-one performance, at its most basic level, sets up a space in which spectator and performer are consciously present with, and to, one another. Whether or not this mutual presence is the focus of the interaction, the form invites the spectator to engage, more directly than in one-to-many performances, and perhaps more (self-)consciously than in most of our day-to-day interactions, with what is involved in being-with another person, a face that she recognises as ‘another “myself”’. The most immediately evident level of engagement is likely to be social – the awkwardness, embarrassment, resistance, longing, and (in the best case) the sense of being recognised and in some way attended to by the other – that arise before, during and after the encounter. But sharing physical presence with another implies not just a recognition of another subjectivity, but also an acknowledgement of mutual being in space and time that is ultimately founded on a felt sense (whether conscious or not) of common bodily being. The other appears to me as ‘another “myself”’ not only because of an assumed common understanding of our social context, but by virtue of an embodiment in a form more or less similar to mine. If it is the other’s face that commits us to responsibility for them, it is because underlying this responsibility is the awareness that we are of the same stuff. We emerge from the ‘same’, as Irigaray puts it, and recognise one another on this basis, at a bodily level that precedes and underlies any cognitive apprehension. We each, in our own way, know what it is to rest on bones, to engage muscles in action, to live in and through our skin, to feel pain. Whatever the nuances of our individual perceptions, we smell, taste, see the world through the same organs. We share fundamental bodily substance, processes and needs. We breathe the same air. In this chapter I consider how performance that engages with one of the most basic substances, and most

vital processes, of our shared existence may not only bring the spectator to a renewed awareness of her material present-ness with/in the performance, but also articulate a commonality of material being shared with performer(s), co-spectators and more widely with the world in which she dwells.

Breath sits at the core of our existence. The biographical journey of each human individual, as of a vast number of other animate beings,¹ begins and ends with breathing. While this is not to deny the importance of the embryological journey from conception, or to ignore the notion of spiritual continuation prevalent in many traditions, human life is generally understood, both ontologically and temporally, as coterminous with embodied breathing. It is the first thing our bodies learn to 'do' on leaving the oneness of enwombment: the newborn's viability as separate being is confirmed by its first independent intake of air. It becomes our constant companion: any human action (including those performed subject to or alongside a holding of breath) must be supported by it. Correspondingly, the individual's life ends with the end of breathing.² As the origin of our individuation, breathing also underlies our being-with, our sharing of being with other individuals, both human and other-than-human. The air, indivisible and ungraspable substance, creates the ground of the universally shared activity of breathing. Breath in turn is the vehicle for much of our communication with one another, through sound and speech. As vital support and apparently limitless resource, breath/air is widely revered as principle of life and source of creation. Yet precisely because breathing is so central to being, it must become an entirely forgettable, unconscious process if we are to engage in any of the other activities required to sustain life. Nevertheless, it is one of the few such automatic bodily processes that are to some extent under our conscious control, and of which we can readily become aware.

¹ Including, of course, many aquatic organisms that use mechanisms other than pulmonary respiration to absorb oxygen, as well as plants that absorb carbon dioxide or oxygen through leaves and other structures.

² While technological developments have complicated definitions of clinical and biological death, cessation of breathing remains one of the main criteria (along with cessation of blood circulation and brain death) used to determine death.

If life starts with breathing, so too does performance. No performance can take place without the breathing of performer and spectator. While, as I note below, many performance practices have developed techniques that exploit this dependence on breathing to enhance physical or vocal potential, and hence heighten effect, in the majority of cases these are used to direct the spectator's attention elsewhere than to the breath itself. Indeed, the automatic, unconscious nature of breathing is precisely what makes an emphasis on breath in performance – taking it as either material or subject, or both – so striking. If breathing is so fundamental to animate being as to be synonymous with it, performance that focuses on breathing brings with it an attention to being. Furthermore, if attention is drawn (like a breath) to breathing in the context of performance, to the breathing of performer in the presence of (breathing) spectator, it is also drawn to the mutuality of breathing in the shared space, to performance as a place and moment where breathing is held in common. Attention and breath, performer and spectator, are drawn together. My focus in this chapter is on one example of a performance that proposes breath as physical substance, and the act of not-breathing as a performance in itself, to examine how it invites the spectator into a phenomenal awareness of her own being alongside the performer, how it articulates some of the broader meanings invested in breathing, breath and air, and how it engages ethical questions of listening and relation with the other.

In this account of Jordan McKenzie's *Holding My Breath* I draw on a detailed experiential account to argue that the spectator's engagement with her own bodily being is key to the effect of the performance. I suggest that the issues it thereby raises in relation to living, dying, co-presence and shared being point to ethical questions of the relationship with the other but equally open the potential for wonder in the face of the common presentness it brings into being.

Holding My Breath, presented at the Arnolfini in Bristol as part of the 2010 InBetweenTime festival,³ is scheduled to run from 3.00-4.00 pm. I approach the entrance a few minutes after it has begun and am asked to wait outside, along with three or four others: the room in which the performance is taking place is small, and audience numbers are restricted.

Over the next few minutes, two or three spectators leave the space and I am eventually invited to go in. The entrance to the small, square, white-box gallery space is in one corner, and as I move in I am obliged to pass quite close to McKenzie, who stands at the front of the room before a waist-high white plinth, his hands cupped above it. Approaching him, I peer into his hands to see an ice cube, perhaps 2 cm x 2 cm x 3 cm, gently held in them, a few drops of meltwater pooling beneath it on the dark surface of the plinth.

As I move further into the room, my eye is drawn to a construction on the wall opposite McKenzie. White tape on the grey wall marks out a rectangle approximately 2 m high and perhaps 60 cm wide; within it are cloudy marks of black charcoal, some light, others denser, a few spreading out across the taped boundary. Beneath this 'drawing', a heap of brown paper bags, mostly half blown up, some apparently split, and marked with charcoal on the outside, spills out over the floor.

Knowing something of McKenzie's practice, and having read the programme information about the work he is showing at the festival and accompanying exhibition, I draw some conclusions about what I am presented with. As I understand it, the performance Drawing Breath which McKenzie presented four days earlier involved viewers' hands being placed on his heart as he breathed out into a paper bag marked with charcoal, which then left a trace on the wall; I assume that the

³ Jordan McKenzie, *Holding My Breath*, Arnolfini, Bristol, December 2010.

drawing installation here is the result of that process.⁴ He has also presented Condensation Box, which the programme describes as ‘an exploration of restriction and loss in which a glass cube is placed over the artists [sic] head. The sound of breathing is amplified in the box and the breath obscures vision and suggests tears reminding the audience of a time when the act of breathing will stop.’⁵ I imagine that the cube of ice he is holding is the result of, if not that particular performance two days earlier, at least a similar process.

I move towards the back to stand, like the other eight or nine spectators, close to the wall, a rough circle fanned out around McKenzie. As I do so I begin to take in more consciously his costume and demeanour.

Dressed in a crisp, dark, pin-striped suit, white shirt and tie, he sports a moustache waxed to precise points and combed-back, pomaded hair that evoke, at least for me, an early 20th-century gentleman-about-town. He appears still and focused, looking down at his hands, from which, every so often, a drop of water falls. He remains in this position throughout the performance, impassive and almost motionless. I read a deliberate lack of engagement with the audience, his concentration entirely on the process taking place in his hands.

For the next forty minutes or so I remain in the room, most of the time near the back corner, as other spectators come and go, or move around

⁴ McKenzie subsequently fills in the details for me: in *Drawing Breath*, a single spectator enters the room, and McKenzie draws close enough for the spectator to feel his breath on her face. He opens his shirt and places the spectator’s hands on his chest as he breathes deeply in and out. He then moves to the wall, taking a paper bag coated with charcoal dust, and exhales deeply into it, causing the charcoal to float off in a cloud that settles on the wall and floor. Finally he bursts the paper bag against the wall, on which a microphone is mounted, forming a stronger mark and creating a sound that fills the room. Jordan McKenzie, personal communication, 22 January 2011. All subsequent references are to this conversation.

⁵ InBetweenTime festival 2010, programme; see <http://www.inbetweentime.co.uk/events/detail/jordan_mckenzie_uk_-_condensation_box/> [accessed 12 January 2011]. Again, McKenzie fills in the details for me: the performance is presented to two spectators at a time, seated either side of McKenzie, who has a frozen glass cube placed over his head. As he breathes, the water vapour condenses and trickles down the inside of the box, and onto his shoulders. This trilogy of works was made partially in response to the death of McKenzie’s father, who was suffering from pulmonary disease. McKenzie, personal communication.

the space, some staying only a few minutes while two or three others, like me, spend longer and seem to settle back into taking time with the performance. Occasionally I shift my position, moving to lean against the wall, or craning forward to see around another spectator. I am conscious of the restriction on audience numbers, and initially intend to spend only a short time there, but while I am periodically aware of feeling that I 'ought to' cede my place here, I find myself increasingly compelled to stay for the duration of the performance, until the process is complete.

Perhaps prompted by McKenzie's focus, I keep my gaze centred on his hands, watching the water dripping intermittently from them, only occasionally broadening my focus to take in the entire image of his body in front of the plinth, or looking away to the other spectators or the space. My attention, however, shifts in and out, sometimes focused on McKenzie, his body and relationship to the ice/water in his hands, at others drawn by sounds inside or outside the room, or engaging with thoughts and feelings related and unrelated to the performance.

Mckenzie's impassive demeanour is striking. Combined with his costume, it suggests a fixed intensity of concentration rather than a relaxed stillness. He maintains this throughout the performance, apparently unmoved by distractions from people talking outside, and one or two spectators taking photos only inches from his hands. I find myself actively looking for movement, particularly the movement of breathing, which I am unable to detect. It is as if the activity of breathing has been transferred, with his breath, into his hands – the sole movement here being the slow melting of ice and seeping of water from between his fingers. Once or twice I see him move his hands; I wonder if the cold has forced him to shift position, or perhaps he needs to change the position of his fingers to accommodate the ice and water. Once I notice a flicker of movement cross his face – an infinitesimal

trace of an indefinable emotion which I read as a response to the loud conversation taking place just outside the gallery.

In resonance, I am aware of my own movements and bodily shifts. I notice the weariness of limb that calls me to seek the wall with my back, the pressure in my feet after I have been standing for a while. When I find my attention wandering I return after a moment to focus on my own breathing, the performance calling to mind this simple meditation exercise that brings me back into a sense of my body in this space. But although quiet, my breathing feels deliberate and effortful, a willed assertion to myself of my presence, in the context of McKenzie's apparent immobility and the silent breath he holds in his hands. And underlying this, there is perhaps a hint of rebelliousness, a defiant assertion of breathing as a continuation, an ongoing process, against the fixity of the solidified breath and McKenzie's posture. I feel my breath breaking into (out of?) this frozen structure, almost part of another world.

As the performance continues and my attention shifts between attention to McKenzie, occasional distraction and my own reflections on breath and breathing, I am increasingly aware of memories and emotions arising from its personal resonance for me. I think of last breaths, of what it means for breath to be frozen, of witnessing the last breath. At one point, moved by a combination of emotion and the fatigue of standing in one position, I slide down the wall to sit on the floor. I can see less from here but still have a clear view of McKenzie's face and hands, until another spectator briefly moves across in front of me. Momentarily distracted, I turn inwards, focusing once more on the resonance of endings and last breaths. When I look up again, I am shocked to see McKenzie shaking the last drops of water from his hands, and then walking out of the room. It is as if I had become transfixed by the still image, convinced that this frozen moment would continue for

ever. Having determined that I would stay to the end, I find I have missed the moment of moving on.

After a moment of collecting myself, bringing myself back to my presence here, I get up and join the other spectators who have approached the plinth to view the performance's trace. As I do so I realise that the top of the plinth is covered in a fine layer of graphite, into which the melting ice has dripped, forming a splash pattern perhaps two centimetres in diameter. Although the mark still holds the sheen of water at this point, it is clearly drying out quickly. The breath seems finally fixed, no more movement possible. This impression is reinforced when after a couple of minutes McKenzie returns with a cuboid glass vitrine, which he places carefully over the top of the plinth, departing again immediately thereafter. The mark/breath is preserved but definitively sealed off from exchange with the outside air, the possibility of breathing. This indeed seems like the last breath.

* * *

Mckenzie's final gesture not only seals his breath from the outside, but marks it as an object of value, reinforcing the performance's insistence on the significance of this small volume, this *most* ordinary of activities. Placing breath at the centre of the image (Mckenzie's hands holding the ice in front of his own centre), and making it both subject and medium of the work, it invites attention to the place of breath (or rather, the movement of breathing) at the centre of all human activity – including the witnessing of, and subsequent reflection on, performance.

Breath *is* life. Breath is essential to life – without it we cannot survive more than a few minutes. There is an inescapable, imperious drive at the end of each outbreath to draw in the next inhalation, to invite in the oxygen that feeds our cells, and once that breath has nourished us, to let out what is not life-sustaining. However long the breath can be held, the next breath inevitably

follows: the infant's preternaturally extended suspension of breath in mid-sob precedes an ear-shattering cry, an irresistible demand that summons life-sustaining food or nurture. The held breath demands sustenance and care. No one dies from holding their breath – the body's instinctive response overcomes any will not to breathe, even if it means taking in the poison that will suffocate us, the water that will drown us.

The awareness of breath as key to life is reflected in the universal recognition of, and reverence for, breath in symbolic systems and accounts of being-in-the-world. In traditions throughout the world and throughout history, 'breath is universally regarded as a principle of life'.⁶ And breath in this sense, as fount of life, cannot be understood in isolation from the air that supports it, the apparently limitless medium that makes breathing possible. Breath, air and wind come together in understandings of the life-force that brings the world into being and animates each living individual: the divine breath creates order out of chaos and gives life to (inspires) animate beings. From the Chinese *qi* and Indian *Vayu* to the Hebrew *ruah*, ancient Greek *pneuma* and Latin *spiritus*, the same concept encompasses divine, life-giving power and the substance that passes through the mouth and nostrils.⁷

Air, as all-encompassing divine breath, has equally universally been understood as one of the founding elements of the world, often even as the source of all. Even in the modern West, where dominant narratives of world-creation draw largely on physical science and evolutionary theory, air is acknowledged as essential to human existence, and the notion of it as one of the four basic elements remains common currency.

⁶ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. by John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 120.

⁷ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, p. 121.

Substance, matter, form

If breath is life, then what we breathe is life-giving, the sustenance that nourishes our substance. Air is literally ungraspable, the most evanescent, the most insubstantial of our elements, habitually contrasted with the stability of the concrete. Yet it is also matter, a body that touches ours. We sense the warmth or the cold of the air on our skin, a function of the speed of the air particles as they swarm around us and come into contact with our surface; we feel its humid dampness or the icy bite of a bitter wind. In the modern West, our commonsense scientific understanding of the air also tells us that it is composed of molecules of gases in varying proportions which we draw into ourselves, including the oxygen that is so vital to replenishing our own substance. As we open to the world, the matter of the outside touches on our most intimate inside: approximately 21,600 times a day, with each inhalation, the molecules of oxygen, nitrogen, water vapour and other gases settle momentarily on the surface membrane of the intricately branching alveoli of the lungs – an area roughly the size of a tennis court – before seeping through the membrane into blood cells, to be transported to the furthest reaches and innermost depths of the body.⁸ 21,600 times a day what our cells reject or no longer have need of passes back the other way, washing with the tide of venous blood to the lungs, through the alveolar membrane and along trachea, throat and nose to the outside. To breathe is to be constantly immersed, drowning in this enveloping substance. Yet as Irigaray points out, air is the most forgotten of our elements, underlying our bodily presentness in a material world but itself disappearing in philosophical understandings of being.⁹ Irigaray posits air as the mother, the maternal body that precedes, nourishes and gives birth to our being, she who is the very condition of Being, and hence of awareness of being, but is forgotten precisely because she is always prior. Here again, the metaphor resonates with contemporary scientific understanding of the relationship between air and human life. It is the upper

⁸ Frederic H. Martini and Edwin F. Bartholomew, *Essentials of Anatomy and Physiology*, third edn (San Francisco: Pearson/Benjamin Cummings: 2003), p. 466.

⁹ Irigaray, *L'oubli de l'air*, p. 24.

layers of our atmosphere, which protect the earth from the hostile environment of heat and solar wind beyond, that render life possible in the first place. Air, more than just an amniotic fluid in which we float, is thus also our container, a structure that creates our very possibility as Gabrielle Walker points out: 'we don't just live in the air. We live *because* of it.'¹⁰ In thematising the world, then, we reverse the relationship: in our commonsense understanding, randomly moving molecules are organised by the multitudinous rhythms of animal breathing, the slower cycles of plants' absorption, the exchange into liquids with the beating of the waves. Air is shaped around the more solid objects of the world, and by the passageways within and between them. It is sounded in speech, in birdsong, in the sough of the breeze through branches or the wind's howl through a rocky cleft. We in turn discover our resonance, our own rhythms and structure, from the subtler structures of the air. Sounding out our breath, our voice, we hear ourselves and enjoy the resonance of our inner spaces (vibration in throat, echo in ear) as well as the vibration of ourselves outwards. Breathing in and out, we seem in some small way to govern or hold the air we take in and release. But our containing, the language of our conceptualisations, Irigaray suggests, creates a void rather than an atmosphere. In our attempt to hold and structure the air, we suffocate ourselves: in the Western tradition, she contends, speaking itself, inherently dependent on breath, has actually become inhibitory to breathing. 'Our language [...] paralyse[s] breath. [...] Our messages, our truths, are generally breathless, suffocated and suffocating.'¹¹ Holding our breath in our speech, as if we had a choice of whether to open to the air, we forget that, just as the mother's breath nourishes the child in the womb, breathing life into her, we are breathed by the air. Perhaps it is only when we consciously retain breath, reaching the limit of our capacity, that we become aware of the air's imperative, the gentle insistence on opening us to her openness. If air is, as Irigaray suggests, the giving through which we come into subsistence, into body, we have to give

¹⁰ Gabrielle Walker, *An Ocean of Air: A Natural History of the Atmosphere* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 6.

¹¹ Luce Irigaray, 'Un souffle qui touche en paroles', in *J'aime à toi* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), pp. 187-199 (p. 187).

way to the air in order to be alive. We have to allow the frozen breath to melt, to flow out of our grasp, in order to receive the fluid gift through which we become solid. Air is at once our container, our substance and the medium in which we find our being – solid, fluid and gas.

What makes the substance of the air, and breath, ungraspable is its movement: it cannot be fixed in one place, held in a hand or a lung. Correspondingly, it is in our own constantly moving animation that we most fully engage it. The life-giving element that encompasses and in-spires us is precisely an *animating* force. While we may perceive ourselves as solid bodies in space, we are in fact remarkably fluid (our bodies consisting of 50-60% water by weight¹²) and, as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone points out, like the air, innately grounded in motion: ‘movement is our mother tongue’.¹³ Breathing forms one of our most basic, most consistent movements – part of our substrate of motility, as it were, an essential constituent of the ‘primal animateness’ that is ‘the foundation of our sense of ourselves as agents in a surrounding world’.¹⁴ The movement of breathing brings the outer world of the air into us and opens our innermost spaces to the outside. This articulation of inside and outside is of our essence: as Bachelard puts it, ‘man is half-open being’,¹⁵ and this constant exchange is what allows us to know ourselves. In order to constitute ourselves as subjects, as in some sense determinate individuals, we have to open ourselves to the world. We ingest the outside, breathe it in, absorb it through our skin; yet we have a sense of boundary, precisely of an inside and an outside. At every level of our bodies, we are both closed and open: the semipermeable membrane of each cell both contains an organism, a microcosmic replication of the body it forms part of, and allows matter to pass through; it is capable of opening to

¹² Martini and Bartholomew, p. 566.

¹³ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. xxv.

¹⁴ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 117.

¹⁵ In *Le Poétique de l'espace* Bachelard considers the phenomenology of our relationship to various kinds of spaces, including the drawer, the nest, the shell, open space, and ‘the dialectics of outside and inside’, arguing that ‘on the surface of the being, in that region where the being *wants* to show itself and *wants* to hide, the movements of closing and opening are so numerous, so often inverted, and so charged with hesitation that we might conclude with this formula: man is half-open being.’ Bachelard, p. 200.

what is needed for life, or to expel waste products, and also of closing against toxins or unnecessary substances.¹⁶ This oscillation between immersion and containment grounds our perception of the world, suggests Lévinas: we perceive objects outside of us, but always within the 'elements' in which we are immersed, and which are characterised by an indeterminacy that 'precedes the distinction between finite and infinite'.¹⁷ Air is in this sense quintessentially elemental – indivisible, ungraspable, and always around us – and we depend absolutely on our opening to it, our ability to contain it momentarily in our bodies even as its movement continues within us.

In order to maintain our half-openness, our intertwining of inside and outside, we have to be constantly in movement. Breath, as Silvia Benso points out, is a phenomenon of movement:

there is no *pneuma*, no breath (substantive) except in breathing (verbal), and breathing is a pulmonary activity (and not a status) of taking in and letting out, of inspiration and expiration. It is breathing, not simple air, that individualizes the human being, that gives him or her subjectivity, and that ultimately constitutes his or her soul. Such an activity of breathing provides physiological as well as psychological, physical as well as spiritual life; and in this sense, more than a material element (as air is), *pneuma* is a force, a life-force.¹⁸

Mckenzie's ice cube has to melt, to vanish into air that can be breathed again: breath cannot be substantivised. Even when we do temporarily suspend our cycle of inhalation and exhalation, movement continues within the body as oxygen is transported by the blood to each cell and waste products are carried back. If we persist in holding our breath this movement continues until carbon dioxide builds up in the blood to a level at which the body's automatic response overrides the will to remain in stasis, and demands the movement of exhalation/inhalation. The body in which breath is still is the lifeless body. It is

¹⁶ Martini and Bartholomew, pp. 55-74.

¹⁷ Lévinas, *Totalité*, p. 139.

¹⁸ Benso, p. 14.

not so much, then, that *breath* is life, for the held breath is ultimately an impossibility, as Mckenzie's performance in fact subtly makes clear. It is the *movement of breathing* that constitutes life. The performance brings us back to Merleau-Ponty's fundamental point that our *being* in the world is constituted by our *movement* in relation to it.¹⁹ Not only is our perception – indeed, our very consciousness, as Sheets-Johnstone contends – grounded in movement, but breathing, as the basic movement that supports all others, indicates our inextricable enmeshing with the world: we take the world in, and breathe ourselves out, the reciprocal exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide with other living beings forming a mutual life-support cycle for us and our world. We are in this mutual exchange, our 'flesh', as Merleau-Ponty suggests, in the chiasmus between ourselves and world.²⁰ Moreover, we are inseparable, and substantially indistinguishable from the matter that supports, feeds, births and breathes us. In an ever-moving ebb and flow, we are constantly coming from it and returning to it: air becomes breath becomes air.

Containing the unbounded

In a sense, then, what Mckenzie presents here is a contradiction in terms. Here is an apparently still image: a man purporting to hold breath as a solid object in his hands. But like the air, breath cannot be held indefinitely, contained and divided. There is never a fixed moment of breath – there is nothing but the breathing, and breathing cannot be separated from living body. On this level the performance holds something of the irony of Duchamp's *Air de Paris* or Manzoni's *Artist's Breath*, in its suggestion that this boundless substance can be quantified and enclosed. Conversely, the static form of the final drawing

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 117.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible*, pp. 172-175.

evokes the second version of Manzoni's work, the empty container from which the breath has inevitably escaped.²¹

Mckenzie's articulation of the breath in the static forms of image, ice cube and drawing suggests a desire to pin down the fleeting, evanescent air, to keep it within his grasp. Irigaray's reading of Heidegger points to the anxiety evoked by the unbounded, the need to contain, to reify, to categorise;²² she argues that Heidegger cuts the 'clearing' in which Dasein 'dwells' out of the primordial openness that allows Being, and thus creates a closure. Lakoff and Johnson note the ubiquity of the 'container metaphor', derived, they argue, from humans' sense of ourselves as 'physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins'.²³ To breathe is necessarily to be open to the unbounded, to relinquish some sense of boundary in order to receive the substance that will replenish ours, allowing us to continue in being as separate, definable entities. The urge to contain in response to this opening is reflected in microcosm in the held breath, the momentary illusion that we have control over what enters and leaves us, that the modest volume held in the lungs is ours to shape and retain. But as Irigaray suggests, the quest to control the relationship between air and body, the management of breathing, runs much deeper, and more broadly, than such brief, willed action. It is not only manifested at the level of thematisation, the structuring of the air in the conceptualisation of space, time and being; it also emerges in the management of physical bodies.

Breathing accompanies and underlies every moment of our being. While health conditions or deliberate effort may result in brief hiatuses, they are experienced as exactly that – a momentary pause in the continuum of

²¹ See 'Piero Manzoni Archive', <http://www.pieromanzoni.org/EN/Gallery_en/popk225.htm> and <http://www.pieromanzoni.org/EN/Gallery_en/pop149.htm> [accessed 25 April 2011].

²² Luce Irigaray, 'From *The Forgetting of Air* to *To Be Two*', trans. by Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček, in *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, ed. by Nancy JHolland and Patricia Huntington (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 309-315, p. 310.

²³ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 29. Irigaray's argument would suggest that this sense of boundedness is in fact a reaction to unnerving boundlessness, rather than an innate sense of being.

breathing.²⁴ There is evidence that individuals tend to maintain a consistent breathing pattern over periods of years.²⁵ The rhythm and depth of breathing may be involuntarily altered by changes in emotional state, or by varying levels of physical activity, but the underlying pattern returns. And breath forms our first, most basic and most lasting relationship with the world. As we build our sense of our own being through our interaction with the world, 'learn[ing] our bodies [...] through movement',²⁶ our breathing becomes one of our deepest, least conscious levels of knowing ourselves.

Breathing, though, is more than a simple involuntary physiological process. As the held breath reminds us, it is, to a limited extent, amenable to conscious control and manipulation – a fact that has been exploited for centuries in pursuit of spiritual and physical goals. Singers and actors have developed specialised techniques of harnessing breath in the production of vocal sound (and much performance training works to inculcate such enhanced or modified breathing to the extent that it *becomes* automatic, at least in the context of performance); free divers train to arrest their breathing for up to fifteen minutes; yogic and other meditation practices use a range of techniques that involve controlling the length and timing of breaths, and the focus of breathing in the body, to enhance physical and spiritual well-being; breathing techniques may be used to induce trance states for healing or religious purposes.²⁷ Breathing becomes a tool for conscious shaping or development of the body and the self: certain breathing patterns are desired, others regarded as symptomatic or even generative of malaise.

²⁴ Although more chronic respiratory restriction due to congenital or acquired conditions may generate greater ongoing awareness of breathing as function, the process of breathing continues, creating the ground for this awareness even as it is awakened by the physical difficulty. The work of artists living with respiratory conditions, such as Martin O'Brien, articulates these difficulties directly in performances that, like McKenzie's, draw attention to a constant activity that generally escapes the notice of those with normative respiratory function. See <<http://www.martinobrienperformance.com/performance.html>> (accessed 5 April 2017).

²⁵ John T. Capoccio, Louis G. Tassinari, Gary G. Berntson, *Handbook of Psychophysiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 276.

²⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 253.

²⁷ Capoccio, Tassinari and Berntson, p. 279.

But if breathing can be instrumentalised to modify bodily states and processes, it is equally influenced by them. On a less conscious, and much broader, level the physical process of breathing is subject to manipulation and modification that we are largely unaware of. We do not breathe in isolation: as Merleau-Ponty points out, we come into being in a social world, and our way of being is determined by interaction with a cultural as well as a physical environment: the social world is

not [...] an object or sum of objects, but [...] a permanent field or dimension of existence [...] with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectifications.²⁸

The very centrality of respiration to every moment, every movement of animate being means that it is inescapably, and profoundly, influenced by learned and imposed ways of being in body. Patterns of breathing are unavoidably social: our bodies, and our way of being in the world, from our most explicit signifying gestures to our most unconsciously adopted habits of movement, are shaped by a multiplicity of forces, from genetic inheritance and physical environment to the example and instruction of other bodies, whether articulated or implicit. Our breathing is as much part of our social being as any other aspect of our embodiment. Historical and social analysts have demonstrated how social forces operate on individual bodies, connecting us into collective patterns that embody a history and a culture transmitted through movement, and shaping our bodies and our own potential for movement. Foucault's charting of the classical age's 'discovery of the body as object and target of power',²⁹ and the individual incorporation of discipline through prescribed physical comportment, and Bourdieu's account of 'habitus' both highlight the importance of cultural environment in body-learning, pointing out how bodies, and the ways they move and act in the world, are contingent on the societies in which they come into being. Embodiment and animation,

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 421.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 138.

initially determined largely by physical capacity, come to be set in lasting patterns through our interaction with our cultural as well as our physical environment: '[habitus] is what one has acquired, but which is incorporated in durable fashion in the body in the form of permanent dispositions.'³⁰ Feminist scholars in particular have demonstrated how differential socialisation of female- and male-gendered children results in differences in embodied praxis.³¹ These culturally determined modes of embodiment and animation are rarely specifically focused on respiration, but inevitably have an effect on breathing; conversely, the resulting patterns of breathing will influence the potential for embodied form and action. From the ideal 18th-century soldier's stance 'standing upright [...] throwing out the chest and pulling the shoulders back'³² to the closed, arms-across-front posture girls in the modern West unconsciously learn to adopt,³³ the embodiment of cultural norms through the forms and movements that bodies are allowed, encouraged or disciplined to assume shapes breathing (as simply trying out these postures for oneself amply demonstrates). Modes of dress, physical adornment and body modification may add a further layer of respiratory restriction or freedom.

Our breathing, then, is both ours and not ours, as dependent on our engagement with others as it is on our innate capacity and physical environment. Breathing is social – not just in the sense that we all breathe the same air, sharing the oxygen and recycling the carbon dioxide amongst ourselves and other animate beings, but also in that our mode of breathing communicates, both overtly and subtly. Breath both holds and responds to meaning, its function in speech only one aspect of its capacity for both conscious and unconscious communication. Involuntarily altered breathing may draw attention to an event or state of being – the gasp of surprise or shock,

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980), p. 134.

³¹ Iris Young, 'Throwing like a girl', in *Body and Flesh: A philosophical reader*, ed. by Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 259-273.

³² Foucault, p. 137.

³³ 'Women generally are not as open with their bodies as are men in their gait and stride. [...] women still tend to sit with their legs relatively close together and their arms across their bodies.' Young, p. 262.

the staccato or arrhythmic intake and exhalation of sexual excitement. More consciously communicative breathing harnesses this expressivity in the sigh of resignation, or the long slow exhalation acknowledging release from a state of tension. And breathing states themselves are communicable: witnessing another holding his breath, we will tend to halt our own;³⁴ when soothing an agitated baby, we may slow our own breathing as we encourage a quieter, relaxed state.

While those with normative respiratory function may be aware of temporary speeding up and shortness of breath in states of heightened emotion, or the deep grasping for air after strenuous exertion, we are less likely to be conscious of how our learned habits of movement and interaction with the world shape the way we breathe, unaware, until perhaps it is pointed out in a conscious practice such as actor training or yoga, to what extent our breathing may have been determined or limited by the way we are in the world. In the modern West this internalised body discipline increasingly requires containment of the body's interiority, sealing it from the outside and minimising the release of abject internal substance to the outside. Children are early socialised (disciplined) to contain bodily emanations – including, to some extent, breath – in public. While breath may be directed toward another in speech or other communicative sound, this is not generally read as an expulsion of substance. By contrast, the intrusion of breath per se into the social arena tends to be unwelcome: to feel another 'breathing down the back of one's neck' is perceived as unpleasant; snoring disturbs others seeking quiet rest; 'bad breath' is repellent and to be avoided at all costs. This anxiety around the fluid, leaking inside resonates with that evoked by the unbounded, uncontainable elemental, and is reflected in aesthetic conventions of beauty, including in performance. The body of classical ballet (particularly that of the female dancer, idealised

³⁴ This occurs not just in the presence of another holding his or her breath, but even on hearing the suspended inhalation of a held breath, as I have observed in the course of working on *Suspend*, an interactive performance and sound project based on audio recording of people holding their breath. See e.g. *Suspend*, installation and performative interaction, 'Chester Performs', Chester Cathedral, 2 October 2008. For a short edited recording of these held breath sounds, see Appendix 1, 'Suspend recording'.

representative of perfect femininity) is sealed, disciplined by long training to hide all signs of physical exertion and contain abject exudations such as sweat and breath: 'dancers are trained to minimise' the 'sounds of [their] pointe shoes, their breathing, their physicality.'³⁵ While use of the breath undoubtedly forms part of classical ballet technique, it is not to be revealed to the spectator. It was only in the early 20th century that breath began to re-emerge as a perceptible feature of performative movement, pioneers such as Isadora Duncan recognising how the containment of breath restricted or dictated movement, and pleading for 'teach[ing] little children to breathe' as preparation for dance.³⁶ Still later, breathing came to form the foundation for modern dance techniques, notably that of Martha Graham, and began to be articulated as gesture in its own right, in works such as Doris Humphrey's *Water Study*.³⁷ Breath re-emerged as material for performance, from Cage's *Song Books* to Beckett's *Breath*,³⁸ and continues, particularly in contemporary dance, to be presented not just as narrative gesture but as movement/sound in its own right.³⁹ In one sense, McKenzie's performance extends this use of breath as material – and the two pieces presented previously directly articulate his breathing in the moment of performance. However, *Holding My Breath* also suggests an ironic comment on such performance, the breath presented not as fleeting gesture, one with the ephemerality of performance, but as (apparently) fixed object.

³⁵ Helen Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 99.

³⁶ Isadora Duncan, quoted at <<http://www.idii.org/>> [accessed 16 October 2017].

³⁷ See Dance Heritage Coalition, 'Doris Humphrey', <http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/humphrey_essay_siegel.pdf> [accessed 16 October 2017].

³⁸ Cage's *Song Books* comprise solos for voice in which the sound of breath forms an important component of the composition. In Beckett's vanishingly brief stage work *Breath*, two 'birth-cries' are interspersed with the amplified sound of 'inspiration and expiration'. '*Breath*, by Samuel Beckett', <<http://www.samuel-beckett.net/breath.htm>>

³⁹ For example, in Les Ballets C de la B's recent *Out of Context: For Pina* dancers 'breathe and gasp into microphones': see Zoë Anderson, 'Les Ballets C de la B, Sadler's Wells, London', <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/les-ballets-c-de-la-b-sadlers-wells-london-2006779.html>> [accessed 25 April 2011].

Breathing underlies both our physical and our social being. Yet just as air is the most forgotten of elements, breathing is the most overlooked of our (at least partially) consciously controlled activities – far more than walking, turning our heads, using our hands to grasp, those of us with normative function are able to take completely for granted that we breathe. *Holding My Breath* resonates with both the numinous significance of breath as symbol and the everyday forgetting of breathing. McKenzie's presentation of breath in crystalline form, held before him for spectators to see but not touch, invites reverence for this precious, hard-won object (I cannot but wonder, during the performance, how much dedication and time it took to bring this small materialisation into being); the enshrining of the final drawing in the vitrine separates (and protects) it from the everyday world of air and all of our breathing, offering it as a focus for aesthetic appreciation. But equally, his deliberate gesture in allowing the ice to melt, the breath to flow free and disperse, leaving only its trace in the charcoal, evokes the necessary forgetting of breath, the letting go of the air, that allows us to go about our daily activity, including the making and witnessing of performance.

Breathing time

This dispersal of the held breath, though, points not just to the easy forgetting of breathing in the everyday moment, but also, more disturbingly, to breathing as a continual process of disappearing. The movement of breathing is not just an oscillation to and fro, resting in an eternally repeated present. Breathing is also dying. From the moment of first emergence into the world, each breath in is a birth, each exhalation a death. Each breath taken and released is a breath we will never take again, one more in the long sequence that moves inexorably towards our ending. Each breath is a loss – doubly so, with the disappearance of the present instant as it passes into the past, and the loss of futurity, as the time left to us is reduced by this moment of never-to-be-retaken

breath.⁴⁰ The held breath hovers inbetween, striving for the impossible present, a suspension of living and a postponement of dying. *Holding My Breath* articulates the pregnant balance between the moment of presence and the progress towards future, between the ungraspable and the inescapable. While attending to the apparently fixed present of the held breath, the performance itself manifests the impossibility of positive presence, quietly progressing towards the end when all movement, all breathing is stilled. In doing so, it articulates the mortality that gives us our sense of time, and hence underlies our awareness of present-being. The certainty of our own end, combined with the impossibility of experiencing it, create as it were an absolute presentness that we cannot get beyond.

We cannot know our own death; we can only rehearse it in witnessing the death of the other, suggests Derrida:

if death is indeed the possibility of the impossible, and hence *the possibility of the appearing as such of the impossibility of appearing as such*, man, or man as *Dasein*, never has [...] a relationship to death as such, but only to dying, to de cease, to the death of the other who is not other.⁴¹

Performance is such a rehearsal, such a witnessing, as Herbert Blau suggests:

When we speak of [...] Presence in acting, we must also speak of its Absence, the dimensionality of time through the actor, the fact that he who is performing can die there in front of your eyes; is in fact doing so.⁴²

⁴⁰ Indeed, it is a triple loss, if as Derrida suggests we can never coincide with our own present, since in the consciousness of the present we must absent ourselves from it in order to represent it to ourselves. See Jacques Derrida, 'Signs and the blink of an eye', in *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. by Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 547-554 (p. 551).

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Apories* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 133.

⁴² Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the vanishing point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 83.

If all performance is an invitation to witness the other's dying, *Holding My Breath* extends this invitation on two levels: present as performer, dying in front of us as we die in front of him, McKenzie also holds in his hands a tiny, translucent window onto the end of his existence, and thus reasserts his, and our, presentness through the moment of performance.⁴³

McKenzie's cradling of the small ice cube in his hands suggests a care for the precious resource of breath, a concern with conservation of an essential that is routinely forgotten. Yet by this very action he makes breath a 'thing', an object that can be manipulated, held and controlled. The stillness of the image, his impassive demeanour, the frozen breath, suggest stasis or arrest. By literally crystallising the breath, he removes the movement of breathing. In contrast to durational performances based on continual repetition (which I consider in the following chapter), what is given here is not the apparently constant present of the infinitely repeated moment, but a moment that seems to remain for ever itself in its stilled state. The persona McKenzie presents through costume and demeanour comes from another time, but so does the breath he holds in his hands. Read as a still image, the moment is already no longer present. It partakes of the dual temporality that Sontag posits as characteristic of the photograph, 'transform[ing] the present into the past and the past into pastness'.⁴⁴ Apparently fixing time, the performance as it were depicts itself and is thus always falling back into its own past.

In this frozen moment, time apparently stands still. McKenzie has arrested the proceeding toward the last breath: we appear to be suspended in the eternal present of this one held breath. Without movement, it seems that time holds its breath, suggesting that presence in the moment might be this stasis, this suspension of animation. But this is to miss the delicate articulation of the image, a subtle, inexorable movement that forms the core of the performance, imperceptibly disturbing the frozen picture. Even from the distance where I

⁴³ A window that has, at least notionally, been created through another 'enactment' of dying, in the enclosure of *Condensation Box*, with its references to suffocation and drowning.

⁴⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), p. 77.

stand, I can clearly see the drops of water falling every so often from between McKenzie's fingers, testament to the continuing movement of the breath held in his hands and, indeed, the change in the very nature of the substance he is holding, from solid ice to liquid water and, presumably, to a small amount of water vapour evaporating into the air of the room. Moreover, I myself continue to move, breathing, shifting weight, blood pumping around my body, and to witness the lapping waves of movement in the space as spectators come and go, crossing and recrossing between me and McKenzie in a solid, vastly enlarged echo of the air molecules that constantly circulate around and through me and the objects I perceive in the world. As I watch this held breath slowly dissipating, try to detect the movement of the performer's breathing, I am brought back again and again to my own presence which is never present, the unbearable passing of the moment as I am obliged, in order to *be* present, to keep moving on, keep breathing towards my own ultimate absence.

However, the random, fluid movement of the water is being directed toward a particular end. When, the performance complete, I approach the plinth to witness what remains of the once frozen breath, I become aware that throughout this process McKenzie has been making a drawing – the marks created by the movement of his slowly melting held breath. The drawing remains as a trace but erases the passage of its making, the substance of its medium exhausted in the completion of the mark. As it does so, the meaning of breath as medium shifts, from the material used to create the work to the conduit for passage of the spirit, the movement of creation that disappears as it delivers its message. This conclusion was of course prefigured by the trace of the previous performance marked by the 'drawing' on the opposite wall, whose process of making I did not witness (and know about only through the 'trace' of the trail in the festival programme). The performance is articulated in what Derrida might call the 'future anterior', the yet-to-come that is already completed, as an obligation on the spectator which has no present, but yet leaves a trace. This trace is at once a remaining and a disappearing: 'To leave the trace is also to *leave* it, to abandon it, not to insist on it in a sign. It is to

efface it.⁴⁵ The trace remains here, but this is not the breath: there is no trace of McKenzie's ungraspable, unpreservable, formless breath, the air is gone with the performance – yet it has traced the drawing. It appears to have returned to static, unbreathing form. Thus breathing, which cannot be held, is finally fixed by its ending. Like the marks on the wall that record the dissipation of one exhalation after another in the performance of *Drawing Breath*, this small pattern in the dust holds the emptiness of a breath that can never again be breathed.

Using a (pre-)drawn breath to *draw* breath, McKenzie *draws* attention to the articulation of form and process involved not only in making this particular performance, and artwork in general, but in the material being of the world as a whole. *Holding My Breath* speaks both to the substantiality of air and breath, their capacity to create form, and to the fluidity of the process of making, the artwork (both performance and object) as emergence and impermanence, becoming. Drawing, with its sense of pulling, attracting, teasing out, allowing something to emerge, suggests movement, a process of coming or bringing into being, as Tim Ingold suggests;⁴⁶ it has the verbal quality that also characterises breathing. While form is, indeed, a key concern of McKenzie's 'body drawing' practice, in which he articulates the formalism of the mark emerging from embodied movement, this is a form rooted in and emerging from its own process. Ingold argues that the creator's work of bringing something into being might better be considered as a process of weaving rather than an act of making, a process that 'situates the weaver in amongst a world of materials, which he literally draws out in bringing forth the work.'⁴⁷ McKenzie's drawing (of attention, of breath, of mark) articulates this creation of artwork as a process of allowing to emerge that is continually engaged with the world from which it emerges. His process appears committed to the solid, substantial mark. However, in choosing to enact the process of making it, he highlights the

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici', in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 159-202 (p. 190).

⁴⁶ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 72-73.

⁴⁷ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 10.

centrality of movement, the passing of time, the breathing of the air, to the mark that results. Although the performance image itself appears static, breathing must continue. As I continue to watch McKenzie, searching for the movement of his breath or any slight outward shift that would indicate the constant inner dance inherent in his embodied, animated presence, my breathing repeatedly comes to my attention. My breath mingles with that of the other spectators, creating complex interchanges of rhythm as each individual's cycle meets the others. We exchange bodies. And despite my inability to detect the movement of McKenzie's breathing, I know of course that in order to maintain his still position, he breathes as regularly as I do. The still image belies the constant change required to maintain it, contradicting the very essence of what it manifests. And notwithstanding the visual reference to a patently constructed persona, like any performer McKenzie is also present in the space as himself performing; he *is* breathing, now, as he performs this character holding the solidified breath of the past. His breath, like mine, is contributing to the warmth that is melting the ice. And equally his solidified past breath will not stay as it is: in order to be presented to us now, it must also disappear so as to reappear in the action of the performance, and in the final drawing. Even the trace, though it appears more lasting than the frozen breath, has its own cycle of appearance and disappearance: at McKenzie's instigation, when the exhibition closes, the mark on the plinth will be discarded, and the drawing on the opposite wall painted over.⁴⁸

Form, then, is articulated as process, material in movement. The stillness of the image itself seems to draw movement, or at least to bring it into focus. I find my own response to it in the noticing of my breathing, my shifts in position, the wandering of my attention. Other spectators create movement in the space, their proximity to McKenzie pointing to his presence as a breathing, moving body in a shared space, rather than an immobile picture regarded from another plane. Even when the room is relatively quiet, movement of the air in the room continues as breath circulates from one to another – augmented by

⁴⁸ McKenzie, personal communication.

infinitesimal contributions from other beings breathing, and moving, in other spaces of the building, from the invigilator standing just outside to visitors viewing the exhibition in other parts of the interconnecting gallery spaces. Movement of the air is not just constant, but spatially indivisible.

Movement brings time with it. Breath moves us inexorably on through our lives, just as the ice – the most volatile of solids in our atmosphere – must melt and evaporate, returning form to formlessness. McKenzie cannot hold his breath for ever: eventually he must let it go, shaking the last of the water from his hands. The melting of the ice reminds us that ultimately the next breath must be taken, that movement must continue as life goes on. We cannot stop time, cannot stay midway along the path to the last breath. And while we may witness another's dying, we cannot die for him, as Heidegger points out.⁴⁹ The time of dying is not a time the living can enter: it is, Alphonso Lingis suggests, a time 'disconnected from the time of the world [...] a time without a future, without possibilities, where there is nothing to do but endure the presence of time.'⁵⁰ This is not the time of the held breath, belying the ongoing process of breathing that supports it; it is rather – extended for the duration of dying – the moment of pause between inbreath and outbreath. All the living can do is accompany the dying in this moment, continuing to breathe as we extend 'the touch of consolation', remaining alongside the other 'as he sinks into the time that goes nowhere, not even into nothingness.'⁵¹ This responsibility to accompany, and to witness, an altered time is reawakened in the temporal ethics of durational performance. My determination to stay until the end of McKenzie's performance is not just a desire to see how it turns out, but also a commitment to honour the performer's commitment, to witness his 'dying'. As Adrian Heathfield suggests, '[for] the spectator, an aesthetics of duration is

⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 284.

⁵⁰ Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 173-174.

⁵¹ Lingis, *Community*, p. 178.

marked by an engagement with phenomenological time, with time as it is felt as a force and product of relational and inter-subjective exchange.⁵²

In its subtle balance between air as substance and air as movement, between breath as circumscribed volume and breathing as process, McKenzie's performance points up the impossibility of presence, the continual passing of present into future. The held breath appears to arrest us in the present. But in fact it can only hold onto the past and is thereby inescapably passing itself, missing its own present. The suggestion of suspense in the title of the piece is replaced by a sense of more fluid waiting (in the sense of waiting *on*, rather than waiting *for*), which is manifested too in the attitude of spectators – the movement in and out, and around the room, the relaxed attitude of many who lean against the wall or quietly stand, occasionally shifting position. The unconscious tendency to suspend one's own breathing in sympathetic response to another holding his breath is not evident here: I sense no one actually holding their breath. Instead there is a sense of allowing, a space opened for what is and what is to come. And for me the meaning of 'holding' here thus shifts from the arrest of breathing to a sense of cradling, a tender support of this small volume of breath, a gentle allowing of its change over time, its return to the air whence it came. In this it might be seen as in some way reciprocating or mirroring the air's unperceived, uncontainable and indefinable enveloping gift as evoked by Irigaray, 'the being passed from one to the other, from the other to the one, before the gift is constituted as such'⁵³, the gift of 'a medium in which a gift can take place'.⁵⁴ It suggests a relation of care towards this common resource, 'passing it forward' to the present and future beings who share it. In so doing it evokes an ethics of relationship to the world at large, but one that begins in this very room, between spectators, performer and other beings present here. And by this token it engenders the potential for a return to wonder at this shared existence, the unrepeatable

⁵² Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Techching Hsieh* (London/Cambridge, MA: LADA/MIT Press, 2009), p. 22.

⁵³ Irigaray, *L'oubli de l'air*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ Irigaray, *L'oubli de l'air*, p. 123.

present moment of a single breath amid the ongoing breathing of the world. In the quiet attention it solicits to this simplest of bodily processes, the performance makes place for a collective wondering that inherently invokes a mutual relationship of care. And in the opening to wonder – at the unknowable other, and the ‘same’ from which we emerge – begins an attitude of care.

Operating on various levels of temporality, this performance throws aspects of ‘present’ and ‘presence’ into relief, drawing the spectator to reflect on her own sense of self-presence. Playing on the contradiction between stasis and flow, between eternal present and ever-passing moment, it appears to reinforce Derrida’s argument for the impossibility of presence. The time evoked is not that of the endlessly repeated cycle, but rather suggests a linear journey. It might then appear to contradict the sense of mindful being-in-the-moment fostered in meditative awareness of breathing: there is no timeless repetition here, no continual return, but a decided movement towards an end, a set period of time (albeit dependent on a range of factors, not the least of which is the breath of spectators in the space which contributes to the movement of air and the warmth that melts the frozen breath. It occurs to me later that the limit on audience numbers might not only be a strategy to ensure visibility). There is movement here, but towards an inexorable conclusion. In this sense it appears the epitome of both Phelan and Schneider’s understandings: it can only *be* through the gradual disappearance of the breath; it remains in the trace that marks its passing.

But Irigaray’s account of the air suggests that to read the performance only on this level would be to miss its potential for opening to a different sense of what it is to be present. In its interweaving of breathing and air, of presence and mortality, its contrast between the formal aesthetics of the image and the formlessness of the melting breath, *Holding My Breath* articulates fluidity and change in the face of a grasping for fixity.

Irigaray’s contention that the *air*, rather than the earth, is the basic element of Being, is challenging: disturbingly ungrounded, it suggests a shifting

seasickness of never quite knowing where one is. Enacting the melting of the solid into air, McKenzie's performance articulates the shifting nature of this rootless grounding, offering a subtle reminder that it, and I, cannot be fixed in time. The fixed image, the frozen breath that appears to articulate a static present is in fact a past, a breath (or breaths) that belong to a previous time. The presentness of the performance is indeed, as Phelan suggests, in the disappearance of what it presents us with. With its gradual, understated alteration over time, it quietly underscores the flickering of my attention, changes in my position and alteration of other elements of the surroundings that mean my relation to it is never the same. Yet this does not mark it as ontologically distinct from any other kind of 'presence'. The presentation of a still image that is not one calls for a heightened attention to its moment-by-moment becoming, and thereby reminds us that this is the nature of presentness. The performance *is* in its breathing, – neither the contained volume of *Air de Paris* nor the empty container of *The Artist's Breath* but the flow inbetween, existing only in its own movement, and inevitably vanishing.

Mckenzie's performance offers us the time of our lives, the time of our breathing. In its focus on breath and its inevitable ending, it draws attention to the ongoing movement of breathing. While its movement is subtle and ostensibly in a single direction, the articulation of the air invites awareness of the continuing cycle that grounds both the performance and our experience of it. Giving fragile, inevitably fleeting form to the formless, it allows the forgotten air to be remembered, and offers a reminder of our 'half-open being'. The elemental is not just that *through* which we perceive, as Lévinas contends, or that which contains us, *in* which we find our Being, as suggested in Irigaray's reading of Heidegger: it is that which we *are*. Solid and insubstantial, constantly moving and ever-changing, it is not just a substrate of being, but being itself: 'Air could be this nothing of the being: the being of the being.'⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Irigaray, *L'oubli de l'air*, p. 70.

Interlude – Practice (II)

Performing Matter

Mckenzie's material, the frozen ice, takes its own time and determines the duration of his performance, but also articulates it with the body-time of breathing. In this interlude I return to my own practice to consider how performing with and through materials has allowed me to engage with ways that time and memory are manifested in bodily being, and with the material becoming of my own body, and the *matter* of time. I consider how this work harnesses the temporality of the material to explore what is at stake in physical present-ness through time, and the potential of repetitive durational performance to establish a temporal relationship between performer and spectator that engages a particular sense of shared presence. I reflect through a series of durational performances, starting with my first solo work.

1999

A large, white-box theatre space with movable seating rolled back to the back wall, leaving an expanse of light wooden floor. Low lighting marks a soft-edged diagonal pathway across the space. At one end there is a pile of sand, about a metre wide, perhaps 30 cm high, and formed into a crescent-shaped miniature dune. Above it, on a plinth, sits a video monitor.

I am walking across the space, carrying a grain of sand between my right index finger and thumb. I am barefoot, in black long-sleeved top and black trousers. As I reach the end of the pathway opposite the pile of sand, I bend down and carefully place the grain of sand alongside a small collection of others that form a roughly circular heap about 3 cm

in diameter. I straighten, turn round and walk back to the 'dune'. Squatting down, I move my hand over the sand and select one grain, pick it up between finger and thumb and straighten up, to turn round and walk back along the pathway to the other side, where I will deposit it.

I am some way through the second performance of Longshore Drift, a four-hour durational performance which consists of the single action of taking a grain of sand, carrying it across the space and depositing it at the other side, continually repeated. The video monitor above the large pile of sand shows a real-time recording from the previous performance, a close-up of my hand selecting each grain of sand. Sometimes the recorded action coincides with the same movement in the current performance, sometimes it is out of sync and appears to echo or anticipate the action in the present.¹

Spectators are invited to come and go as they wish through the duration of the performance. There are periods when even the colleague who is assisting me leaves and there is nobody else in the space. I have been alone for a while when someone enters, quietly.

I immediately notice a shift in my attention, now split between my task and my relationship with this unknown spectator (I make no attempt to see who is watching). From having been absorbed in the task itself and my response to it – the ache that is seeping into my knees as I repeatedly bend to pick up or lay down the sand, the sweat on my hands that makes the grains stick to my fingers, a range of emotions from boredom to anxiety to a meditative calm – I now feel some responsibility towards this other person in the space. Ridiculously (it seems to me), I feel a need to entertain – despite the premise of the piece, that it presents a simple repeated action unmediated by any concerns with 'performance'. I am subject to the same excess of

¹ For images of this piece, see Appendix 1a, 'Longshore Drift documentation'.

presence that Ridout evokes in his experience as a spectator 'singled out' by the performer. I find myself wanting to vary which hand I use to pick up the sand, where I carry it in relation to my body as I walk across the space, my position as I place it down. My walk becomes more purposeful. I will the video image to coincide with the live action. I worry the viewer will be bored, will not get the point. If I pay finer attention to my bodily sensations, I notice that these anxieties have generated a change: my breathing has shallowed, my heart rate is slightly higher, the tension in my neck is heightened. I have the sense of a physical awkwardness where previously my gestures flowed seamlessly, 'without thinking'.

But as this spectator moves into the space, sits down and stays, and I continue with my task, these feelings gradually subside. Though I remain conscious of the quiet presence of this unknown other, it becomes an accompaniment, a sharing, rather than an objectifying gaze. I am returned to being present with the action, at moments feeling that I myself am being moved by it rather than carrying it out, with the added awareness of another following, and resonating with, my action.² My sense of present-ness has shifted from the self-consciousness of 'social dys-appearance' to a more diffuse sense of being-with.

Longshore Drift came into being around a single image – that of a person endlessly transporting sand across a space, one grain at a time. Part of the inspiration for the piece was the sand itself – a delicately painted mixture of shell fragments in which each grain was clearly distinguishable and visibly unique, which I had come across by chance on a beach. But my image, with its suggestion of an interminable task, immediately evoked for me a parallel with that of Sisyphus forever rolling his rock up the mountain, only to have it

² This shift, or settling back, into a sense of shared presentness with the spectator is one I have experienced in other durational performances, as well as in *audience* (as described above). My interpretation of it is that it arrives at the moment when each of us has allowed ourselves to drop (back) into the temporality of the performance.

roll down the other side. And in embodying this image my aim was to bring a focus to the living of everyday detail, the unrepeatable repeated action that both makes each moment new and builds into a lifetime's experience, stored in a body continually reshaped by this process of living.

While on one level it presents a single image, the performance also enacts a process of accumulation that mirrors the sedimentation of experience, of pattern and habit, in a body through the successive 'present moments' of everyday life. The title refers to the geological process whereby sand is gradually shifted along a sea shore by the action of the waves coming in at an angle to the beach. Like the build-up of habit, or wear and tear, in a body through repeated iteration of small actions (brushing teeth, climbing stairs, grasping a steering wheel) the process is virtually imperceptible to daily human observation, but can be witnessed in its cumulative result, the build-up of sediment alongside groynes or breakwaters, or the difference between maps over time.

I drew on simple strategies to carry me through the four hours, such as focusing on my breathing, and paying attention to my shifting physical sensations. The piece is not just about the fulfilment of being in each singular moment, but also about what the repeated action builds up in a body in terms of experience and wear; I hoped that my own close attention to this process might both relieve some of the physical discomfort I anticipated and suggest to the spectator the accumulation of habit, fatigue and physical memory in my body, and in her own. In fact the spectator's awareness of these physical effects is more likely to be aroused by more obvious signs, such as the cracking of my knees or the sniffing of my continually running nose; nevertheless my hope is that if she chooses to fall in with the temporality of the work, these visual signs will come, perhaps unconsciously, to be underlain by a bodily resonance generated both by 'mirror neuron' response and by a sense of shifts in her own body, generating a sympathetic response at both conscious and subliminal body level.

Longshore Drift was the first in an ongoing series of durational, often site-specific performances that work with a material-body relationship to reflect on how time and memory are experienced, stored and manifested in bodies. Where *Longshore Drift* presented an externalised metaphor as a way of reflecting on cumulative physical process, other works have drawn the material more directly into the physicality of performance, using the accumulated weight of many stones gathered from a beach, for example, in *Second Skin* to articulate the burden of 'emotional baggage' and how the cumulative impact of affective experience shapes the body over time.³ My work with knitting in performance, which began with *Knitting a Rothko* in 2006, uses the practice as a metaphor for long-term gradual processes in the body, and the ways that time and space are articulated through the material. Individual stitches map moments in time, the few seconds it takes to form each one progressively accumulating into hours and days as the yarn is gradually transformed into a three-dimensional fabric. At the same time the yarn is refigured and worn by its working, as betrayed by the way it retains the shape of previous stitches even once they are undone.⁴

In *Hour (for Penelope)*, the yarn is repeatedly recycled, as I sit between two strips of knitting suspended on poles. I knit and un-knit at the same time, repeatedly unravelling what I have just made and reknitting the same stretch of yarn to the other side. Like the weaving of Penelope, unravelled each night so that it would not be completed before her husband Odysseus returned, the knitted fabric never grows any bigger, but the yarn passing over my needles becomes increasingly frayed, crinkled and split, as well as gathering sweat from my fingers and dust from the air. The wear of the yarn mirrors the accumulation of fatigue in my body: over the hours my gestures become less fluid, I increasingly need to keep shifting in my chair to find comfort, and eventually (in the longer, 24-hour version of the piece) struggle to stay awake

³ For images of *Second Skin*, see Appendix 1a, 'Second Skin documentation'. The piece was later used as the basis for Richard Heslop's film *Pour It On* (<<https://vimeo.com/114222559>> [accessed 28 November 2017]).

⁴ For *Knitting a Rothko*, see Appendix 1a, 'Rothko documentation'.

at moments. The accumulation here is not of substance, of knitted fabric, but of wear and aging in both yarn and body, pointing to the gradual alteration of the body's tissues over a lifetime of repetitive activity.⁵

These pieces are born out of a fascination with body memory, and in particular the unconscious resonance, weight and substance stored through a lifetime of experience. Engagement with the practices of Body-Mind Centering® in particular gave me an insight into how experience can be held in the tissues of the body, expressed in a particular stiffness, congestion or fluidity in a joint or membrane, the strongly felt weight or quiet withdrawal of an organ, the sense of power or weakness in bones and muscles. Our physical bodies are the only places we have to store these personal memories,⁶ which thus mark and shape our living matter in various ways.

In these works I solicit ostensibly external matter to stand in for the tissues of the body, both as a metaphor of bodily process and as a visual marker of what my engagement with that matter is forging within my body. The shifting, aging, material body emerges through the shifting, altering matter with which it engages. In the interlocking temporalities invoked by the performances (the brevity of individual actions, the gradual accumulation of process, the time of lives, of topological shifts, of geological epochs) the spectator is invited to immerse herself in her own bodily, material time. The temporality of the body is articulated as inextricably enmeshed in the temporality of the world, the *matter* of time. In the chapter that follows I consider how this engagement with the moving substance of matter opens a space of resonance between material body and material world, reveals the layered and shifting temporalities of matter, and points to a bodily knowing *through* movement that arises in the intertwining flows of body and environment.

⁵ For video documentation of this work, see Appendix 1a, 'Hour documentation'.

⁶ I hesitate to use the mechanical simile of hardware here, but it might be pointed out that just as data cannot be stored without the physical means to do so (notwithstanding the apparent ethereality of 'the Cloud') we depend on particular configurations of cells and tissues to retain our memories, whether accessible to consciousness or not.

Readers are invited at this point to engage with the practice element of this submission, *Talking Matter*. For the examiners of this thesis this will be through the live version; for later readers it will be through documentation.

Chapter 3

Performing the material: Moving matter, memory and time

Performance is reputedly the most immaterial of artforms, its evanescence preventing it from establishing concrete, lasting form. Performance appears to have substance only in the 'traces' or 'documents' it leaves behind; its medium is time, and it is not in and of itself materially substantial. Yet performance depends vitally on the material – on the matter of bodies, of objects, of architectural structures and physical landscapes and, of course, of the air – in order to exist. Its medium may be 'immaterial' time, but its media are entirely material. In this chapter I consider the materiality of performance, and ask whether, in addition to engaging the temporal that presents itself as the primary medium of performance, and addressing a *space* of intersubjectivity, performance in fact articulates the matter of the world in the most direct way, *through* its engagement with movement and change. While the temporality of performance renders it as ephemeral in its moment as Phelan contends, that temporality, I argue, is part and parcel of the temporality of the material world, and performance is uniquely placed to articulate its own matter in dialogue with the matter of the world.

I turn here to performance that engages with matter itself, both as performing substance and as metaphor for more immaterial themes, in order to examine the subtle interplay between materiality and ephemerality that performance as a whole essentially harnesses. I argue that such performance draws attention to material temporality and the ephemerality of physical forms, thereby exposing the inherent motility of matter that life depends on. Drawing on Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's account of this inherent motility as the foundation of consciousness, and Tim Ingold's insights into the practice of everyday lives, I consider this engagement of moving matter as the substance of knowing, and

coming to know, in the world, and argue for knowing as a continuing process of improvisation rather than acquisition of knowledge. Addressing the articulation between performance, time, matter and consciousness, I suggest that performance that engages the mobility of matter, including the moving materiality of bodies, also has the potential to draw the spectator back into an engagement with the matter of her own body, a sense of her continually emerging, bodied presence within the flow of materials, and an awareness of how she forges her path of understanding from the moving matter of body and world. I argue that through its peculiar engagement of temporal bodies *in* time, performance articulates its own ontology as a privileged space of presentness.

Melting flesh

November 2010. Visiting the 'Rotor' exhibition at Siobhan Davies Studios in London, I enter the first-floor studio knowing no more about Clare Twomey's performance installation than the title, gleaned from the sign on the door outside. Opening the door to Is It Madness. Is It Beauty, I am presented with a series of trestle tables extending the length of the rectangular room.¹ The tables are laden with large numbers of apparently identical clay pots, arranged in somewhat haphazard rows. As I move into the room and settle on one of the benches set along the wall opposite the tables, I note that the pots are in varying stages of disintegration: some firm and upright, others sagging, partially collapsed or leaning towards the table. Some of the firmer pots appear to have been set on top of the broken-down vestiges of others that have already disappeared. (The exhibition of which the installation forms part has been running for several days, and the performance continuing for a period of hours each day.) The surface of the tables is partly covered with clay-sludged water that drips down onto a plastic sheet placed

¹ Clare Twomey, *Is It Madness. Is It Beauty*. Siobhan Davies Studios, London, November 2010; re-presented April 2016. See <http://www.claretwomey.com/projects_-_is_it_madness._is_it_beauty..html> [accessed 23 October 2017].

over the grey studio floor, underneath the tables. As I settle into contemplation of the picture, I become aware that the pots, evidently made of unfired clay, are all in various stages of a process of decay that takes them from the upright form of those that appear 'freshest' to the sagging, formless lump of clay that sits beneath many of these 'newer' pots, and that what initially appeared a still image is in fact infused with movement. The slow, arrhythmic dripping of water onto the floor is accompanied by a quiet, largely imperceptible shift in the clay of the pots as they settle, sink and gradually fall towards the formlessness of their original material. Occasionally a more abrupt slip offers a moment of contrast, bringing me up short as I turn my focus to the source of movement.

At the same time I have become aware of another presence, a woman sitting quietly against the opposite wall. Dressed in a dark top and trousers, a grey apron and rubber boots, for much of the time she sits observing the slow deliquescence of the pots just as the spectators (who are never more than four or five) do. Alongside her on the floor stand rows of new clay pots of identical form. Periodically, at apparently random intervals, she gets up to place a new pot from her stock on the table, either among the others or on top of one that has broken down sufficiently to form a base, and sits down again. At other points she fills a jug from a bucket on the floor beside her, and pours water into one or other of the pots on the table. After this, or at still other points, she takes a mop to soak up some of the water puddling on the floor, where it threatens to overrun the plastic sheet. These movements – the performer's three basic actions, the sometimes steady, sometimes interrupted dripping of water, the occasional sudden slippage of the disintegrating pots – punctuate the more continuous slow progress of the pots toward their formless end. Small shifts become dramatic, dynamic: a sudden stream of water onto the floor as a pot gives way, the crumbling of one into another. As I sit observing the process, other

spectators come and go at intervals, standing or sitting quietly to watch for varying lengths of time. From time to time I wonder what prompts the performer's actions: I can discern no pattern to the moments when she decides to replace or fill a pot, or to get up and mop the floor. But my attention is focused more on observation of the pots themselves, driven by a desire to see the process in action, to notice the precise moment when gravity overcomes solidity, to witness the moment of falling. I find myself held in this watching, in suspense though I know nothing is suspended.

As I sit repeatedly waiting for the fall, my own sense of time begins to loop over itself, slipping from the linear trajectory of anticipating an 'end-point' to a more amorphous, fluid medium akin to the sludging clay. Time wavers between shifting layers, mirage-like: at points an aching, inexorably linear passing marked by the gradual accumulation – of unformed clay on the table beneath the new pots, of water on the floor; at others a constant, cycling return – water mopped into the bucket only to be poured out again; pots deliquescing into clay that could potentially be re-formed into the apparently endless supply of new vessels. As I sit, I am aware of slumping, sagging towards the wall almost in resonance with the pots in their subtle settling. The metaphor of flesh as clay comes inescapably to me. Time manifests materially both in the inexorable, infinitesimally slow decay of body and in the build-up of sediment.

I have time, here: the performance offers the illusion that I may take time away from it and return to the same moment at any point that day, or indeed on subsequent days. Were it not for the sound of water dripping, for much of the time the scene would appear as still as a photograph. The flow of water, the encroachment of time through the clay of the pots, is imperceptible, so subtle that it is only when it erupts through the wall of a pot and cascades onto the floor that I am reminded of its persistent, unstoppable movement. And with the

repeated replacing and refilling of pots, even this movement resolves into an impression of never-ending cycle. I have a sense of luxuriating in time (or perhaps, non-time) here, that I can continue to enjoy witnessing the still picture, its tiny shifts and sudden slips, for as long as I desire. Leaning back against the wall, I feel released from the pressure of timetables, the impositions of the clock. Paradoxically, the longer I stay, the more still the image becomes: although the quietness is punctuated by the arrhythmic dripping of water, the apparently randomly timed actions of the performer, and the occasional sudden burst through a small clay dam, the repeated return of these events resolves into a comforting sense of continuity, an eternity of present. As time goes on, the urge to detect the precise moment of collapse fades as I am lulled by the promise of its consistent return. While the picture created by the repeated process must change over the time of its presence in this space, there is no sense of a specific end to be reached, a point when the performance will necessarily cease to exist. The performance invites me into a practical epoche, a bracketing of my awareness that there must, of course, be such a point: the supply of clay pots cannot truly be limitless, and the exhibition as a whole has its own duration. The unformed future, known only as an imagined succession of unmarked moments, is present in the form of the clay pots waiting in reserve. The past, shaped by each passing moment into unique events, is evident in the amorphous vestiges of the pots that have gone before, a persistent reminder of their once having been. The present is manifested, inevitably, as becoming, in the movement of the material, the slipping from one into the other as the water seeps through the clay, softening it and absorbing it, the two substances transforming one another in a Deleuzian assemblage.² Clay and water remain distinguishable, yet in their mingling each draws the other towards its own phase of

² For Deleuze and Guattari, bodies (and other 'things') are not fixed forms but rather 'assemblages' or 'constellation[s] of singularities and traits' within the continual flows of matter. Deleuze and Guattari, p. 406.

materiality: pots, clay and water alike are revealed as simply momentary manifestations of the fluid tension between solid and liquid.

Performing matter

Performance matters, suggested the title of a major recent research project. Indeed it does – but it matters not just in the sense addressed by the five-year programme of academic and practical research which ‘[explored] the cultural value of performance, its increased public presence and vital force, and its extensive circulation as a concept and metaphor in critical discourse’.³

Performance ‘matters’, materialises itself forth in the world, in the same sense that it ‘events’, producing itself in moment-by-moment-evolving physical form in time, and thus bringing both a matter and an event into being/becoming.

The temporal, ‘disappearing’ nature of performance suggests that it can only be held, collected and archived through its traces, its artefacts rather than itself.

While Rebecca Schneider has contended, against Phelan’s proposal, that ‘performance remains, but remains differently’,⁴ it is in this *difference* (and *différance*) that the crux of the issue lies. Performance is a ‘time-based art’ but, unlike the film, video and sound work that also fall under this umbrella, it only exists *as itself* in the moment of its undoing, making itself in its dissolving.

Yet performance is inescapably material. It demands bodies and/or objects in physical space, the here and now of the world. Even when it may be apprehended remotely, via weblink or telephone line, it requires material bodies in a material environment both to make it and to receive it, through the bones that support the watching or listening body in a sitting position, the complex structures of the eyes (cornea, aqueous humour, lens, retina, focusing muscles, optic nerve), ears and other sense organs that perceive, and the multiple neurons and synapses involved in the receiving and interpretation of

³ Performance Matters, <<http://www.thisisperformancematters.co.uk/>> [accessed 16 January 2015].

⁴ Schneider, p. 101.

what is perceived, the rare metals mined in central Africa or China in the chips of the computer that screens it, the fibre of the underground cables that transmit it. This is the matter of ourselves and our world that we habitually put to one side, a taken-for-granted physicality without which we *are* not, but which we must forget in order to engage with an ever-changing environment – what Tim Ingold, following Merleau-Ponty, calls ‘the existential condition of our total bodily immersion, from the start, in an environment.’⁵ And in much of our engagement with performance, just as in everyday life, we are used to bracketing out the ‘background’ of both bodily processes and the material world, the gravity that under-stands both the actor on stage and the circus artist on the trapeze, the vibrating air particles that allow the sound of the singer’s voice to travel to our eardrums, the extruded foam cushioning our seat, precisely in order that we may follow a narrative, be drawn into an atmosphere or dance to the music.

Our sensing itself, that by which we receive the performance, is inescapably material, not a matter of disembodied information processing, as if we stood outside of the world we perceive, but a fleshly engagement with the flesh of the world. It begins, on both evolutionary and developmental levels, in the direct contact of skin with world, and the inextricable intertwining of sensing material body with sensory substance. And like all the matter it engages with (both internal and external), the skin itself is constantly in movement and flow. As Michel Serres contends, our skin is not just container but also medium of passage, a semi-permeable membrane that allows matter to flow both from inside to out and from outside into the body. The body is both enclosed entity and open receptor, the physical manifestation of Bachelard’s ‘half-open being’. The flows of the body mingle with the flows of the world: the materiality of the concrete is constantly shifting, never as stable as imagined. Change is thus of the essence of the sensed and sensing world; indeed, it is only *through* movement (both my own and that of the world around me) that I receive sensory information. And through such passages, links and exchanges, every

⁵ Ingold, *Perception*, p. 169.

element of the world touches every other element, just as within the body the indivisibility of connective tissue means that each cell is physically in communication with every other cell, so that the touch of the other, or the world, on the outermost skin reaches deep into the core of the body.⁶ We are always already in resonance (or dissonance) with what is perceived as external, on a bodily, material level. This half-openness, the dependence on the other to have a sense, and to make sense, of being is central to the mutual engagement of performer and spectator in performance.

It is not only the multifarious matter required to bring the performance into being, and the physical sensing that allows the spectator to perceive it, that engage the material of the world: the time itself that is performance's central medium *is* material, apprehended through the physical substance of bodies, things, other beings. Both the time taken by the performance (in the sense of chronological duration) and the performance's time (pace, rhythm) become apparent to spectator and performer through a bodily grasp of shifts and changes, a material witnessing of alteration of what is before and within us.

And it is in this materiality, its embedding in the world of material flows and mutating objects, that performance could be argued to 'remain' *as much as* the object that Phelan and Schneider, in their different ways, perceive as ontologically distinct. In claiming this distinct ontology for performance, both Phelan and Schneider could be said to reify the form through their very attempt to articulate its evanescent existence, or virtual persistence. But if matter is, as Deleuze and Guattari contend, a series of differential flows, performance, in its articulation of the passing material moment, might be said to be the *most* material of artforms, expressing the inherent nature of matter, and our engagement and experience of it, in a dynamic relationship centred on the constantly changing 'present moment'.

In its material engagement of an ongoing present-moment temporality, performance takes up the becoming materiality of world, performer and

⁶ Deane Juhan, *Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork* (third edition) (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 2003), p. 59-108, esp. p. 62-63.

spectator, creating currents or eddies that momentarily disturb and draw attention to the flow of particular aspects of the material, pointing to the processual being of spectator, performer and indifferent passer-by alike. Rather than disappearance, then, performance might be said to articulate a differential flow amid the material flows of body-world-perception, to draw attention to a particular current, or transitory 'plane of consistency'.

The matter of time

Matter brings us into the here and now. It is inherently, persistently present: there is no escaping material being. Matter, in the form of the chair I sit in, the keyboard I type at, the chill of the air, the tickle in my throat that might become a cough, has to be negotiated as it is: it makes no concessions and neither waits nor goes before. Our apprehension of matter is always in the present. While it draws on body-memory (for example in the visual perception of objects, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, where prior knowledge of the texture, temperature or form of an object allows us to perceive those qualities even as our vision takes in only a partial image of it), it is rooted in the physical potentiality of engagement with it in the moment of its hereness.⁷ As I look at the wooden desk in front of me, there is already in my fingers a sense of the smoothness of the planed surface, the relative warmth of the wood compared to the metal of the lamp, the contour of its slightly rounded edges. The matter of our bodies is also always, equally, in the present. While our memories supply us with an endless flow of previous sensations that allow us to apprehend and negotiate the world, these too are held in the material body, shaped and drawn by its negotiation with the world over time, and equally triggered by each new engagement. In some senses, matter imposes itself on us – the intractability of the material, whether of our own body or what we perceive as external to us, demands that our conscious or unconscious intentions adjust, adapt, take into account. I cannot take a short cut around a

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. 370-371.

corner by walking through a wall; if I feel the edge of the desk cutting into my forearm I must move to find comfort. But matter is not just what obstructs or inhibits my intentions; it is the very ground of my being and of those intentions themselves: if, as Sheets-Johnstone contends, movement is the foundation of consciousness, then consciousness itself is grounded in physical substance. Matter is not external to me: 'I' am my embodiment in the material, and a conscious awareness of being here in a material body, arising through sensing and movement, is how I understand being present.

While it is immediately present in its 'thereness', almost all of this matter, almost all of the time, partakes of what Heidegger calls the 'ready-to-hand'; always already there and available to our intentions without our constructing it in conscious awareness. Much of the matter of my world disappears in the same way as Leder's 'disappearing body', the body that underlies all of our conscious undertakings, quietly maintaining an intricate complexity of countless processes without our needing to pay attention to it. In fact we are so at one with the material world that our dwelling in it *is*, as Heidegger posits, our thinking of it, the way we as material beings in a world make sense of that being-in-the-world.⁸ Matter reasserts itself the moment it becomes, in Heidegger's terms, 'conspicuous' by failing or refusing to perform as expected. This is equally true of the matter of my body: it is when the physical world threatens danger, or the body slips out of the unconscious but infinitely detailed functionality expected of it in the day-to-day, that the body-being comes into itself, recalling me to my substance and requiring movement or reorientation before it can fall back into the background. In physical jeopardy, 'the body knows by itself how to say I', as Michel Serres suggests.⁹ Paradoxically, the body that brings us so instantaneously into presence in such situations is the body we have no conscious awareness of: the physiological response through instant release of hormone messengers, nerve signals and

⁸ Martin Heidegger, 'Building dwelling thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert P. Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), p. 158

⁹ Serres, *Cinq sens*, p. 16.

reflex reactions precedes by seconds the ponderous processes of cognitive interpretation of the situation.

We tend to perceive the material as a stable ground, a reliable, identifiable fixity. While liquid or gaseous matter may exhibit its own mobility, water or oil, air or steam maintain, in our perception, a consistency that renders them intelligible and distinguishable from other kinds of substance. But this matter, the substance of our own being and the world we are in constant engagement with, is not a stasis, inert. It is itself in movement; it *is*, in fact, movement. Through a simple but telling exercise of observing the drying of a wetted stone, Tim Ingold draws our attention to the continual process of material through time and space, the shifts and changes that occur through the constant interchange between and within the matter(s) of the world.¹⁰ Significantly, his invitation is to engage with the material *while thinking it*: our understanding of matter can only emerge from the engagement of our own substance with the substance of the world.

But while Ingold's emphasis is on the interactions and exchanges *between* apparently simple materials that generate the continuing flux of materiality – the alteration of the stone through its exchange with human touch, then water, then air, and perhaps human touch again – each of these materials is itself flux: 'the surface of every solid is but a crust, the more or less ephemeral congregate of a generative movement.'¹¹ Ingold, following Deleuze and Guattari, argues that notwithstanding the convenience of conceiving the material world, and to an extent our own bodies, as static, both are in a constant state of flux and

¹⁰ Proposing that the reader takes a stone, immerses it in water, and then places it on her desk for the time it takes to read the next few pages of his book *Being Alive*, Ingold points out that, by the end of the chapter, the now dried stone will be substantially altered, in colour, surface brilliance, tactile texture, sound and other properties: 'the stone has changed as it dried out.' The stone cannot be perceived in isolation from the medium it is 'bathed in'; its 'stoniness', therefore, is not an innate property but a quality of relationship with the matter of its environment (including the observer). 'Stoniness [...] is not in the stone's "nature", in its materiality. Nor is it merely in the mind of the observer or practitioner. Rather, it emerges through the stone's involvement in its total surroundings – including you, the observer – and from the manifold ways in which it is engaged in the currents of the lifeworld.' Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 32.

¹¹ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 24.

becoming: the matter of our world is inherently in movement, and we with it.
For Deleuze and Guattari,

At the limit, there is a single phylogenetic lineage, a single machinic phylum, ideally continuous: the flow of matter-movement, the flow of matter in continuous variation, conveying singularities and traits of expression.¹²

Developments in contemporary physics support this contention: in quantum mechanics terms, it is the *energetic forces* between particles that determine the substantiality and material qualities of what we perceive as matter in the world, rather than any inherent fixity.¹³

What we perceive as the material present, then is, as Henri Bergson argues, but 'the quasi-instantaneous cross-section our perception makes in the flowing mass, and this cross-section is precisely what we call the material world'.¹⁴ 'Really, there is never true immobility, if by that we understand an absence of movement. Movement is reality itself.'¹⁵ Or as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has it,

[the] fundamental stuff of matter is continuously in motion [...] the inanimate is fundamentally animated, [...] not in the traditional animistic sense, but animated precisely in the sense of moving *causa sui*: the world of matter is astir with motion.¹⁶

And we ourselves are of this flowing materiality: 'human beings do not exist on the "other side" of materiality, but swim in an ocean of materials,' as Ingold puts it.¹⁷ The material gives us both the present moment, in the apparent stasis

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, p. 406.

¹³ 'In matter, nearly all of the electrical forces are spent holding the electrons close to the nucleus of their atom, creating a finely balanced mixture of pluses and minuses that cancel out.' Richard Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985): p. 151.

¹⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2010), p. 154.

¹⁵ Henri Bergson, 'La perception du changement', in *La pensée et le mouvant* (Geneva: Éditions Albert Skira, 1946), pp. 141-170 (p. 155).

¹⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 407.

¹⁷ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 24.

and stability of what is here, now, and the passing of time, in the continuous alteration of the matter that we (in all senses) inhabit.

Matter, then, is not just our outside, our environment. It folds into the core of our being and our awareness of being. We are born of, and into, matter, and our experience of the world and ourselves is inherently material. In this sense, the matter of the world cannot fail to be 'ready-to-hand', because we are not only contiguous but continuous with it. Bodies are matter, in all the myriad densities and flows, intricately woven structures and flickering exchanges of an extraordinarily complex living organism. In the elastic density of muscle, the hardness of bone, the tensile strength of ligament and tendon, the giving pliability of skin, the flexible articulation of jointedness, our being is underpinned by a consistent material ground, of which we may become consciously aware at any moment. If the material world draws us, it is not only because we are obliged to engage with it in order to maintain and grow our physical being, but because our matter resonates with that around us:

It is one's own ligneous substance that perceives the sequoias; it is the hard and ferric substance of the bodybuilder's musculature that knows the inner essence of the steel [...] It is the clay of our own body, dust that shall return to dust, that knows the earth and know itself as terrestrial; it is the liquid crystals of our eyes that are drawn to the stars as to brothers.¹⁸

And it is not just on this sympathetic, metaphorical level of resonance that we sense our material connection with the matter around us: having evolved from this matter, we remain of it, and just as the minerals that form our bony tissues are drawn from the soil in which our food grows, the interstitial fluid that circulates around our organs and bathes each of our hundred trillion or so cells has an ionic composition that parallels that of seawater.¹⁹

¹⁸ Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996) p. 59.

¹⁹ Hartley, *Wisdom*, p. 283.

Not only does this world engage us first and most directly through matter, it imposes itself on our attention in fundamentally material ways. Our perception of the world is grounded in a resonance between the matter of our bodies and that of the world: as Merleau-Ponty points out, it is through a bodily engagement that I sense the woody texture of the desk, the softness of the curtain that my gaze encounters.

I *have* the world [...] and I have the positing of objects through that of my body, or conversely the positing of my body through that of objects [...] in a real implication, and because my body is a movement towards the world and the world my body's point of support.²⁰

It is *because* we are material beings, Alphonso Lingis suggests, that we perceive the world as we do:

We communicate with things by embracing them bodily. [...] The sensuality in us that diffuses as our performative mobilization and ego-control slackens makes contact with the materiality of things which induce transubstantiations [*sic*] in us.²¹

The insistence of matter does not only emerge from the 'dys-appearance' of body or 'conspicuousness' of surroundings; it presents itself again and again to us and through us, imposed on our senses by virtue of our own sensory materiality.

Moving matter

Born into, and out of, matter, we are equally born into, and out of, movement. We are never not moving, conceived through a meeting of drifting oocyte and swimming sperm and the journey of fertilised ovum to the lining of the womb, rocked in a sea of amniotic fluid by virtue of our residence inside a living, moving body, and progressively developing senses, organs, limbs, patterns of

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 408.

²¹ Lingis, *Sensation*, p. 53.

movement through our self-movement in the mobile uterine environment. And it is through this movement, as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone shows, that we come into consciousness. The inherent motility of the matter of which living beings consist gives rise to the animation of articulated movement, and hence, Sheets-Johnstone argues, to the phenomenon of consciousness. It is because even the most basic organism is fundamentally mobile that it possesses, and makes use of, the capacity to move itself towards or away from other elements of its environment, on the basis of an assessment and consequent response that form the foundation of self-awareness.²² This kind of contingent awareness and adaptive response is not confined to beings conventionally regarded as 'conscious' or having 'mind'. Michael Marder argues that the movement of plant growth, adaptation, fertility and decay is fundamentally a kind of thinking, positing the vegetal as intelligent responder to the slow or sudden movements of the world it inhabits.²³ Cognitive understanding develops in response to a continual learning process that is through and through bodily, and thereby inherently material, and animated:

The astoundingly varied and intricately detailed biological faculty that allows knowing one's own body and body movement and that in the most basic sense allows knowing the world is a dimension of consciousness. Inversely, consciousness is a dimension of living forms that move themselves, that are *animate*, and that, in their animation, are in multiple and complex ways engaged in the world.²⁴

This consciousness engages the entire organism, and is informed by, and located in, both its internal motility – the vastly varied and intricately specialised flows and rhythms, from the transport of nutrients within each cell to the fast-pumping arterial bloodflow that travels the entire body, from the instantaneous electrochemical jumps of nerve synapses to the slow wash of

²² Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 46.

²³ Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

²⁴ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 52.

cerebrospinal fluid down the spinal cord²⁵ – and its movement in relation to the ‘differential flows’ by which it is surrounded. As I sit following the quiet shifts of Twomey’s pots, my conscious movements (deliberate adjustments of my position to find greater comfort, occasional bending forward to get a clearer view) as well as my more unthinking shifts (gradually settling back against the wall, the wandering of my gaze around the room) are apparent to me as entirely ‘of me’. While I sense the resonance of the flows and substances in front of me with those in my own body, and may unconsciously move in response, my perception of them is utterly distinct: I understand my movement in subtle dialogue with, but entirely separate from, the movement of pots, water, performer and co-spectators, and as unique to me. This understanding is founded in a capacity for intentional movement that is present, and available, to me even when I am ‘still’ – a capacity that has evolved from the simple motion towards/away of the earliest cellular organisms, and which is underlain by the ever ongoing flows of internal bodily processes.²⁶

Understanding ourselves through our mobile materiality, it is also as moving matter that we grasp the moving matter of the world. Gravity itself, our first referential anchor point (both developmentally and in the sense that it grounds *all* of our experience of ourselves), is a matter of movement, a force that is known dynamically, an essential constituent of the sea in which waves of gesture, currents of habit and the flow of thinking and moving twist and eddy through one another.

Animation is vital to an understanding of the organic and the inorganic because both are through and through dynamic, through and through qualitative, and thereby through and through formally distinct. They are in fact in perpetual animation – attracting, repulsing, accelerating, decelerating, joining, splitting, growing, decomposing, bending, twisting, turning, constricting, expanding. [...] They are both

²⁵ Martini and Bartholomew, pp. 236-238, 245-246; see also Hartley, *Wisdom*, pp. 279-283.

²⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, pp. 54-48.

foundationally the very antithesis of matter pure and simple because they are both fundamentally *animated*.²⁷

Inhabiting a shifting, changing body in a shifting, changing world, movement is crucial to our knowing of both self and world. In order to make sense we need to be constantly in movement in response to the changing matter of the world (including our own corporeal matter).

As a bundle of potentials in an ever-unfolding field of forces and energies the body moves and is moved not because it is driven by some internal agency [...] but because as fast as it is gathering or winding itself up, it is forever unravelling or unwinding, alternately breathing in and out.²⁸

Sensing and movement are the keys to being *here*, and both are inescapably material. Moreover, it is our own moving matter, amid the moving matter around us, that gives us the sense of time.

The temporal material

Notwithstanding our primordial enfleshment as moving matter amidst countless other material flows, we are accustomed to applying our thinking to a world that we perceive as separate from us, and to placing phenomena and events in a temporal sequence. And most of our activity depends on taking for granted the everyday 'thereness' of the matter around and of us, its readiness-to-hand. There is a sort of suspension of attention to the material at play in much of our dealing with the world. In attending to performance we continue this suspension of attention to what can be materially taken for granted, or safely ignored, as we attend to the ideas, emotions and images presented before us, and engage in the relationship/s we are invited into. Such suspension of the material can draw us away from the present moment – into a

²⁷ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 109.

²⁸ Ingold, *Making*, p. 96.

fantasy world, a historical period, an atmosphere, occasionally a moment of transcendence – into a sort of atemporality, or suspended temporality. But if matter brings us into the present, performance that attends to matter, and hence articulates matter as movement, has the capacity to re-place us in the moment, the position, the space and body where we are, and in the continual process of becoming.

In the suspended time of *Is It Madness...* I observe both a gradual, infinitesimal passing of time and the abrupt forward jerks of the hand of the ticking clock. I can barely detect the movement of the clay as it softly subsides into itself – sometimes the movement is invisible and I have simply to wait for the next marked slump as it succumbs to the saturating fluidity. The movement of the water ranges from a quiet seeping through the clay that I know is happening but cannot discern, to a soft dripping onto the floor, to a sudden stream bursting through a broken bank and pouring onto the plastic sheet, waking me once more to the continuous *movement* of this picture, the time passing through it. As the performer sops up the water and squeezes her mop into the bucket, it is as if she attempts to wind back the time, pouring the water back into a container where it could conceivably be used to restart the process, poured it into a new pot. Time stands still but moves on. There is both an endlessly returning circle and a continuous passing of individual forms, the never-to-be-repeated repeated again and again.

The slow shift of the water through the clay is a reminder that both time and material are constantly moving, never still, in my body as everywhere else, with the processes that continue even as I sit quietly witnessing, paying little attention to chronological time (though I am conscious of a desire to engage with other work in the building, and maintain an awareness that at some point I will move on, out of this room even as its process continues). Equally, and particularly with my own experience of durational performance, I am conscious that the repetitive process must be accumulating sediments of wear, fatigue, time passed in the body of the performer.

In this absorption in material time, I am aware also of a trust that the process *will* continue, that my absence (or indeed my absence of mind, as my attention drifts occasionally to other concerns) will not cause the action to cease. This fiction, which durational performance tends to both harness and articulate, parallels the confidence of lifelong experience that time itself will not stop: seasons will change, however doubtfully and slowly, matter (including my own body) will continue to age and transform, the sun *will* rise in the morning, whatever the weather, location or drastic deterioration of climate. The fiction of permanence is on a superficial level the fiction of stasis: the pots, and the performer, will be there for ever; the sand will continue to shift infinitesimally eastwards along the shore; the table I write at today will be the same tomorrow. On a deeper level it is perhaps a belief in the reliability of time itself: hours, days and years will continue to pass and the world will change, perhaps unrecognisably, but will return in its eternal circle. The heat death of the universe (a physical ‘fact’ as far as such are understood in contemporary scientific thinking) is a fiction, an imaginary, literally unlivable, unembodiable event. Equally unlivable, unimaginable, is my own death. Durational performance that uses repetition or cyclicity is particularly susceptible to reinforcing this faith, for it is the *cycle* of time that reassures us of permanence (and of our own immortality, in the very real sense that we *live* our mortality only in the moments of our dying). We are continually saved from the disaster of mortality by the return of events, anticipation supported by memory and habit, the reliability of time itself. Indeed, my experience as performer in such works as *Longshore Drift*, and particularly the 24-hour version of *Hour (for Penelope)*, in which I sit in essentially the same position, repeating the same action of unmaking and remaking through a full day-night-day cycle overlooking London’s busiest road, is both of the toll the hours have taken on my body and a strange feeling that no time has passed at all.²⁹

In its foregrounding of matter as process, the way it allows the material to perform itself, Twomey’s work demonstrates that matter stands not in

²⁹ For these works, see Interlude – Practice (II), above.

opposition to the ephemerality of doing, of performance, but rather on a parallel timeline of development, change and 'disappearance' (or we might perhaps rather say, following Schneider, its 'continually different appearing'). My witnessing of this performance, like any other, is a function of what Deleuze and Guattari call a haecceity, an 'entire assemblage' of individual plus context:

The difference is not [...] between the ephemeral and the durable [...] but between two modes of individuation, two modes of temporality.³⁰

The fascination of Twomey's work, for me, lies in its refusal to allow the object to stand as object, its focus on the ineluctably processual nature of all material. The piece articulates the pots not as artefacts, nor even as material, but as a momentary stage in the process of matter. The heightened temporariness of Twomey's pots as forms enables them to stand (move) as synecdoche for the process of transformation that we are generally unable to witness.

Twomey's piece articulates matter in process, or matter as process, centring on an accelerated cycle from material (wet clay) to form (the pot created through the movement of wheel and potter's hand, the evaporation of water), and then, through the movement of 'formless' water, back to matter. In this, and in its use of clay (with all that substance's symbolic resonance with flesh), articulated with the performer's fleshly body enacting the physical force that accelerates the cycle, it points to the inherent cyclicity of all matter, the return not just of pots, but of tables, jugs, rubber boots and human bodies to formless substance that in turn feeds new forms, both organic and 'inorganic'. Time *is* matter in movement. Matter itself *is* movement.

What is striking in *Is it Madness...* is the simultaneous exposure and concealment of processes of transformation usually inaccessible to human perception. The willed acceleration of a process of erosion and decay renders the inevitable end of both pot and body; yet it is mainly in the dramatic collapse that this continuous transition becomes apparent. François Jullien

³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 262-263.

points out how the transitions of existence are never apprehended: ‘we see change, but we do not perceive it.’³¹ Jullien describes the moment when we notice modification as a ‘shattering’,³² but this shattering does not reflect any sudden rupture: it is rather the jolt of a perception that has failed to register the gradual, infinitesimal movement of change. If I focus closely in an attempt to discern precise moments of alteration, I always miss them: the pot that collapses is never the one I am looking at. But if I rest back in a more ‘peripheral’ perception, becoming aware of the whole rather than individuals, I begin to sense myself as part of a subtly mobile landscape, a movement (or concatenation of movements) within movement. The rhythm of my heart syncopates with the dripping of water, my breathing overlaps and merges with that of others in the room, the fluid flows in my own body resonate with those of the varied consistencies on the table.

A frozen image; a repeated moment. At first sight appearing to present a static picture that can be taken in at a glance and returned to at any subsequent moment, in fact Twomey’s piece, like McKenzie’s *Holding My Breath*, hinges on a subtle articulation of that image, a gradual, inexorable shift that moves through the material as the substantiality of object gives way to the flow of time. The still picture is quietly undermined by a movement that points to the impossibility of fixing the moment, or returning to it; the continually reiterated present is revealed as a temporal flow of differential repetition. By presenting the material in flux, these performances offer an opening into a world of constant change; by offering the performing body in articulation with the fluidity of substances that resonate powerfully with, and in McKenzie’s case directly emanate from, the flesh of life, they assert the body’s implication in that flow, the chiasmic intertwining of body and world in a constant becoming. And in presenting these bodily materials taking their journey from one form of matter to another over time, within the bodied performative exchange between performer and spectator, they invite the spectator to witness her own

³¹ Bergson, ‘Perception du changement’, p. 142

³² François Jullien, *The Silent Transformations*, trans. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London/New York/Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2011), p. 50.

involvement in that fabric, her inextricable enmeshing in material temporality. In its speeded-up version of the life cycle of sediment + water —> clay —> pot —> sediment + water, Twomey's piece points to the 'silent transformations' of aging evoked by Jullien, a process of change that we cannot grasp not only because in its moments it is microscopically minute, but also because we cannot stand outside it:

ageing is not simply a property or an attribute of my being, or even a gradual alteration brought to consistency and stability; it is really a consistent sequence, one that is global and self-unfolding, of which the "I" is the *successive* product.³³

'I' am the product of all my previously lived moments, but am never 'here': paradoxically, the only sense of 'being here' I can have is an awareness of continual change (a fact articulated in the Buddhist practice of attention to the present moment, which reveals the fundamentally fleeting nature of all phenomena). The 'present moment' experience described by Stern is precisely that of a temporal arc, a 'passing'

Filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky described his work as 'sculpting in time', a process of shaping and carving that created a particular experience of time on both narrative and phenomenal levels.³⁴ Performances such as Twomey's and McKenzie's could equally be said to sculpt time, not just in the sense of manipulating it as medium, but also in the sense of bringing a form into being, offering time as presence to be engaged with. Time emerges as material, as continuous, flowing texture. And if these performances at first appear to present an image of fixity, an unchanging, object-like presence, by articulating the material in time they give us matter as process, a continuing, fluid

³³ Jullien, p. 7 (my emphasis).

³⁴ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: The Bodley Head, 1986). The Russian term translated as 'sculpting' articulates both 'depicting, portraying' and 'engraving, imprinting'; the experience of Tarkovsky's films, for this viewer, is one both of witnessing a slow unfolding of 'depicted' time through the deliberate, precise attention to fine detail and real-time duration of process in the narrative, and of a bodily living of time through the length of the film and the physical engagement required to maintain corresponding attention, an impressing of time on the viewer's own flesh.

development of both world and body-being: they expose the work of time through matter, including the matter of bodies, and invite the spectator into awareness of her own temporally shifting materiality. Movement is central not only to the living, organic, but to the very material of what we take to be our solid ground. And it is this matter-in-process that forms the substance of movements of creation, growth, aging and decay that is deftly articulated in Twomey's work. By deliberately presenting matter as change, it makes strikingly visible this continual, more or less gradual, more or less slow evolution of the material. The resonance between the decay of the pots and the aging of the human body is poignantly embodied in the repetitive labor of the performer, her flesh infinitesimally borne down by gravity and the weight of the water and pots she herself carries, inexorably worn by the continual cycle of action over time. (Performer Sara Warsop, who alternated with the late Gill Clarke in the daily presentation of the work over twelve days, later tells me how exhausting the performance was, particularly the constant mopping.)

In durational performance, time is brought powerfully into focus. Even when such performance relies on a prolongation of extreme physical stress or mental exhaustion, it carries a sense of its central *matter* being time, in the sense of Tarkovsky's 'sculpting'. But by the same token, it focuses attention on *time* as *matter*, all that we can measure of what we know as time (whether counted by clocks or experienced through the growth, alteration and aging of material objects and material bodies, or as a dimension apprehended through movement in space) being perceived through the medium of the material. My awareness of the time passing as I sit watching Twomey's piece emerges through my witnessing of the disintegrating pots, through shifts in my body as I settle further against the wall, or move to accommodate a stiff joint, and through what I project of increasing fatigue in the performer's body, an imagined accumulation born of my own experience.

In a durational performance that purports to present an unchanging image or situation, it is matter that betrays the movement of time – or rather, is necessarily exposed as the *only* manifestation of what we *experience* as time.

This is not the clock time of chronology – also measured in terms of matter in space, albeit through the arbitrary representative means of a dial divided into twelve or sixty sectors – but the time identified by Deleuze and Guattari as the ‘aeon’, the ‘indefinite time of the event’.³⁵ In this performance-becoming-object/object-becoming-performance, matter and action are revealed as ontologically indistinguishable: to extend Deleuze and Guattari, ‘the difference is not at all between the ephemeral and the durable [...] but between two modes of individuation, two modes of temporality.’³⁶

If durational performance has the potential to offer a sense of time as matter, as it were casting the performance from the material of time, it also presents a sculptural aspect in its tendency to approach the status of object. Repetitive durational performance insists, and in its insistence becomes object-like, an apparently unchanging entity that may be re-encountered, in identical form, at any point during its existence. There is an apparent thickness of presence in the repeated actions undertaken by the performer in *Is it Madness...*, a density akin to that of the image created by repeatedly exposing the same piece of film, rendering time concrete, and the vanishing performance as solid as the walls and floor of the studio I watch her in. The paradox of this work is that time and movement are central to the performance’s emergence as quasi-sculptural object: it requires the consistently repeated movement of matter in time in order to take on its appearance of permanence and solidity. While the ceaseless flow of matter undermines the fiction of a fixed and stable world, the performance at the same time emerges as a ‘sculptural’ presence that depends on constantly repeated movement to present itself. Like everyday matter, time itself here becomes ‘conspicuous’, makes its presence *felt* over and above the transparent stream of its everyday passing.

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 262.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 262.

Articulating time as its primary material, durational performance can expose the arbitrariness of chronology, either by imposing artificial limits on a putatively infinite process (as in Twomey's work, where the apparently endless process is curtailed by the exhibition schedule) or by allowing the process itself to dictate the duration. The period of Jordan McKenzie's *Holding My Breath* is determined not by chronological timetabling but by the interactions between flows of matter in the particular circumstances in which it is presented. The piece has to end with the final disappearance of ice and water from his hands, a duration that is dictated by a multitude of factors affecting temperature and humidity, but independent of any notional programmed time. The body itself may impose a duration, exhaustion or pain bringing process or action to a halt: in my own work *Second Skin* the performance draws to an end at the point when the weight I carry makes it impossible for me to walk, or finally crawl, any further. In each of these works time is revealed as a function of matter, operating on multiple levels or 'lines of flight'.

Performance remains, performance disappears. But *how* is it exactly, that it disappears *and* remains? The answer lies in the medium of its becoming and passing – matter in time. If performance exists in its disappearance, it is because it is in the nature of matter to disappear. Largely perceived in terms of bodies or objects in movement (the fascination of 'human statues' lies in the contradiction of the spectator's certain knowledge that they *are* moving – breathing, digesting, sweating – and the challenge of perceiving their movement through their feat of almost-not-moving), performance 'disappears' because this momentary, vanishing movement appears to be grounded in a material world that never moves. It is only because the flow we can humanly observe differs so markedly from the gravid temporality of what we perceive as inert matter (or indeed from the life processes of much longer-lived organic forms such as trees), and likewise from the imperceptible rapidity of electromagnetic radiation (the time the sun's rays take to reach the wall beside me so vanishingly short that I perceive the patch of light as simply 'there'), that performance *appears to disappear*. And because performance is most

frequently contained within time boundaries that are imposed as much by economic constraints and cultural convention as by physical capacity and aesthetic consideration, it appears distinct within the timeframe of our own seasons and lives, a discrete, passing moment framed within a long life. Durational performance's capacity to appear object-like derives not only from its propensity to present an apparently unchanging image, or an enduring narrative that can be returned to like a book, but also from its tendency to take a time beyond these conventional time-forms, to exist in a different flow and thus appear not to be moving, like the slow-moving train on the line beside us that appears stationary as the one we are on speeds away from it.

Extended duration lacks the distinction that separates the event from the mundane, the everyday: the bracketing off and casting out of experiences into the 'uneventful' through which the event, as heightened experience, must necessarily be constituted. Resisting time's spatialization in cultural measure, duration deals in the confusion of temporal distinctions – between past, present and future – drawing the spectator into the thick braids of paradoxical times.³⁷

Temporal material bodies

'What does not pass in time is the passing of time itself,' says Merleau-Ponty,³⁸ and in the frozen or eternally returning moment of these performances we are invited to step back from the transparency of the flow of time to witness precisely that passing of time, to engage with time as substance through the shifting material of both exterior world and our own changing bodies.

Time not only surges and ripples through my tissues in overlapping waves, it is woven into them, through habit and repetition.³⁹ Time passes through the body

³⁷ Heathfield and Hsieh, p. 22.

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 492.

³⁹ This individual body-time is shaped by a cumulative combination of anatomical and physiological configuration (from lung capacity to the relative proportion of 'fast-twitch' and 'slow-twitch' muscle fibres, to say nothing of more significant variations in limb and organ

not in the sense of traversing it, but of marking itself through the shifting of the flesh.⁴⁰ Twomey's piece offers me the opportunity to engage with, to enjoy time as physicality, a density that is as palpable in my body as it is in the disintegrating pots, and unique to the material it inhabits. Our sense of time is fundamentally an experience of ourselves in and as time, derived from our animate, material being, as Sheets-Johnstone suggests: 'spatialities and temporalities are kinetically created – and [...] space and time are fundamentally constituted in and through the experience of self-movement.'⁴¹

Bodies hold time: bodies *are* time. If, as Heidegger suggests, our sense of time derives from our apprehension of mortality, of Being-toward-Death, or Being-toward-the-End,⁴² then time is inherently material, rooted in the physical body and its shifting, mutable, aging and regenerating flesh. Time sculpts bodies; time carves itself a body, moulding the flesh of the world into tides, seasons, lives. Durational performance that involves the performer in repetitive tasks or strenuous effort has the potential to reveal the workings of time in the body, the accumulation of fatigue, gravity, wear or chronic tension that go largely unnoticed through the daily habits of a lifetime, coming to attention only when the habitual action (brushing teeth, tying shoelaces, the twist of a wrist to turn a door handle) is no longer comfortable or accessible. Our bodies are sculpted by time, but in a continuous process rather than the generation of successive products, an endlessly morphing flow of form that never in fact reaches a

morphology), developmental processes (the amount of space and support the infant receives in developing movement), consciously and unconsciously learned behaviours and attitudes (from curtailment of speed in social environments to unconscious adoption of more submissive or confident conduct), innate or acquired neurodiversity (with personal dynamics influenced by conditions such as ADHD or chronic depression, as well as more subtle variations), and affective experience (a hesitancy acquired following trauma, for example), forming a unique expression that is recognisable not just to the one living it but also to others. The instantaneous recognition of a familiar person at a distance is substantially founded on recognition of her particular dynamic pattern.

⁴⁰ This is particularly apparent in the case of very slow movement such as the *bisoku* technique employed in the performance practice of Body Weather, in which the dancer moves in infinitesimally small increments from one position to another, consciously engaging the entire body throughout.

⁴¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 119.

⁴² 'Being-towards-death belongs primordially and essentially to Dasein's Being.' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 296.

culmination (continuing after death in decomposition and the absorption of bodily remains into further flows).⁴³ Twomey's pots, subsiding through their own weight, McKenzie's melting and evaporating breath, the fraying yarn in *Hour (for Penelope)* mark and stand in for the bodily workings of time that we ourselves are subject to (and indeed, are). The relative stability on which we depend in pursuing the day-to-day activities of survival and more in fact rests on the incorporation of our own processes of change and flow into myriad other flows, so that we perceive our moment-to-moment shifts of matter only in retrospect, witnessing the growth of our bones when we rediscover a childhood photo, watching lines appearing and deepening in skin, or coming to notice the wear in a joint that has caused it to stiffen.

The remembering material

Bodies hold time; bodies *are* time. Our bodies are in constant motion, changing from moment to moment: bodies *are* movement. And through the repetition of movement in everyday actions and habits, our bodies become worn into grooves and patterns, accumulating scars, habits of posture, pathways of movement: bodies *are* memory. I arrive in a present moment that contains all its previous moments, a body, resolutely present, that contains all its past bodies. 'Our remotest past adheres to our present and constitutes, with it, a single, uninterrupted process of change.'⁴⁴ However many times my cells have been replaced over years, whatever the variations in form my body passes through, growing taller, heavier, more or less flexible, when I return to my childhood home I find I retain the kinaesthetic memory of exactly how low I need to crouch to pass through the small doorway into my attic bedroom. With durational performance I can highlight this becoming/remembering body,

⁴³ A process elegantly recapitulated in French & Mottershead's series of site-specific audio works *Afterlife*, which guide the listener through the details of decomposition from the moment of death to the 'disappearance' of the body. See e.g. French & Mottershead, *Waterborne*, Thames foreshore, 27 February 2016; see also <<http://frenchmottershead.com/works/afterlife/>> [accessed 14 August 2017].

⁴⁴ Bergson, 'Perception du changement', p.165.

reiterating an action or continuing a process over hours or days so that the changes in body, the wear and fatigue become palpable, visible in the flesh and at the same time point to the body's continued future becoming. Performing alongside, or with, a material that accumulates its own 'memory' underlines this storage and manifestation of experience in a body. Matter, like bodies, remembers form even as it tends toward disintegration.⁴⁵ And there is a mutual re-membling in the articulation of body with the matter of the world, as Tim Ingold suggests:

the hands get to know materials, or acquire a 'feel' for them; [...] they impart a rhythm to these materials in the iteration of their own movements [...] the materials, in turn, carry a memory of their manipulation.⁴⁶

Matter knows, matter measures time. The fabric of a body remembers all that it has lived through, physically and affectively, whether sudden event, gradual learning process or accumulated habit, and in its structures and movement betrays the memory it holds in matter. And this knowledge is not held in rigidly codified form, but fluidly applied in a constant improvisation with a moving world.

Performance remains in traces – physical, material traces, from the crinkled, fraying yarn, the fingermarks in the clay pots, to the stiffened joints, tense muscles, hoarse voice resulting from its efforts. It remains in memories – not just the cognitively accessed recall or the vivid image suddenly triggered by a snatch of music or a companion's reference, but in the familiarity of a hard seat, the recognition of a particular acoustic – and the strongest memories will be accompanied by bodily resonances echoing from the uncomfortable volume, the restful settling, the heat of other bodies or the vibrating tension of that particular moment.

⁴⁵ Both clay and knitting yarn are materials that are described as having 'memory', a tendency to return to forms into which they have been shaped by craft maker or other agency.

⁴⁶ Ingold, *Making*, p. 118.

Knowing bodies

April 2013. Euston underground station, 5.30 pm. As I move towards the ticket gates, I notice a man walking ahead and slightly to the left of me, carrying two long pieces of 4x4 timber, tied together by a string hanging from his right hand, so the timber swings horizontally at around (my) shin height. I become aware that, although I am hurrying, I am being careful not to approach too close to avoid knocking my shin on the timber. With that awareness comes the realisation that this avoidance is unconscious and relates to a pain that I can already sense in my shin – the experience of having barked my shin against something very similar in the past is within my cells, warning me of the danger and taking steps to avert it before I can make any conscious decision about it.

Without any need for conscious processing, I have apprehended the danger and taken appropriate evasive action, which includes slightly shifting both my lateral position in the crowd and my direction of forward progress to move out of direct alignment with the beams, as well as modifying the intensity of my conscious intention to move as fast as I can toward the ticket gates – within a split second. This is happening hundreds of times a day; perhaps the only reason it has come to my attention on this occasion is that I have been thinking precisely about this kind of body-thinking. I am otherwise generally aware of it only when it is momentarily absent or distracted, perhaps because my attention is so much elsewhere that my body has oriented in that direction too, or because I am so tired that the body/space consciousness that is normally automatically, preconsciously there is absent. Paradoxically, the unconscious body-thinking that supports my conscious engagement with the world can also disappear when I pay it too much attention; as I walk down a long flight of stairs, if I begin to

think about how I am doing it I risk losing my balance, missing my footing as my conscious mind attempts to catch up with my much faster proprioceptive and kinaesthetic senses. It is not because I am unconsciously responding to some cognitive reflection on previous experience of an encounter between flesh and hard material that I avoid being injured by the other passenger's bulky luggage, but rather that a body memory, and a body-thinking, exist at a different level (and one at which processing happens much faster than in lumbering cognitive thought processes).

Bodies know. It is through our matter, in movement, that we learn the world, our own bodies, other beings, human and non-human.

Like the knowledge of any creature, human knowledge rests on animation. Animation means responsivity [...] it means the capacity to move effectively and efficiently in relation to that to which one is present.⁴⁷

And it is through our matter that we re-member our learning, memories stored and storied in cells and tissues forming a basis for sustaining ourselves in relationship with our world and for developing our knowing. As Merleau-Ponty argues, '[a] being capable of sense-experience (*sentir*) – in the sense of coinciding absolutely with an impression or a quality – could have no other mode of knowing.'⁴⁸ The infant begins to discover her world, and her own capacities, through movement: lying on her back, her mouth, eyes, arms reach beyond her, eventually allowing her to roll over. With increasing ease in this movement, she can begin to push through her arms into the floor, developing strength and facility as she gradually propels herself upright, and at the same time encountering textures, densities of effort, in her own body and in her environment. As her muscles strengthen through repeated use, her reflexes

⁴⁷ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, 'Steps entailed in foregrounding the background: Taking the challenge of languaging experience seriously', in *Knowing Without Thinking*, ed. by Zdravko Radman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 187-205 (p. 199).

⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 15.

sharpen, her motor skills become finer, she builds both a continually growing understanding, and body-memory, of the world she is meeting and a deepening knowledge of her bodily capacities that is still constantly finding its edge through new discoveries. No amount of instruction can tell her how to do this. Even once we develop the capacity for receiving and transmitting information through signs and verbal language, merely reading a handbook or listening to lectures cannot bring me to the point where I can drive a car, eat with a spoon, or even stand and walk without experiencing, and practising, the movement through my body. Nor will I find words to instruct others, however capable I am myself, as tellingly demonstrated by the diligent, sometimes frustrated and often comical attempts of viewers of Siobhan Davies' *Manual* to guide performer Helka Kaski through the simple task of moving from lying on the floor to standing.⁴⁹ The painstakingly and sometimes arduously acquired skills of suckling, rolling, sitting, crawling, standing and walking are each progressively learned, mastered and then integrated into a bodily knowing that forms the basis for further exploration. This integration of skills and practices into the body does not end with the toddler's mastering of walking, however, nor with the acquisition of increasingly fine and complex skills through childhood and adolescence, nor even with the adaptation to the developmentally adult body that has completed its growing. Bodies constantly change and adapt, and bodily knowing with them: as adults still, when we acquire new skills (taking up a physical discipline, adapting to changed technology) or develop ways of moving to accommodate an injury, the new practices gradually become part of our unconscious repertoire, a praxis deployed instinctively as the context requires. Even when no ostensible skill is being acquired, habit, preference, and adaptation to processes of aging play their part in a continual learning: I unthinkingly establish a preferred position

⁴⁹ In this work, the performer lies on the floor and invites the spectator to tell her how to move in order to reach a standing position. She follows instructions precisely ('place your right hand by your hip', 'move your left knee over'), occasionally asking for clarification, resulting in her finding herself in sometimes awkward, sometimes unsustainable positions, and frequently ending up back in a supine position on the floor. See Siobhan Davies Dance, '*Manual* at GoMA': <<http://www.siobhandavies.com/watch-listen/2013/06/15/video-manual-goma/>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

on an unfamiliar sofa, accommodate to the additional key on my keyring in order to open the door with my practised gesture. If I reflect on how it is that I am able to go about my daily activities without regularly having to work out how to lift a limb or struggle to balance upright, I sense a deep and primal level of trust in my body's capacity to perform the tasks I am not even aware of soliciting from it, not to say a sense of marvelling at the vast complexity of co-ordination and communication that underlies all of my willed actions. This trust is based in my body's familiarity as *myself* that begins in my earliest lived experience:

The background of our adult human world is [...] saturated in the dynamic congruency of affect and movement and in the kinetically articulate bonds that originally linked us epistemologically to the world as infants [...] What develops initially [...] is a knowing body.⁵⁰

And our learning, our knowing, are our own, and intimately dependent on our unique and individual engagement with matter within and beyond our own bodies. Myriad factors will play into the very particular knowing that we build of ourselves and our world, from specific configurations of cells (such as the brain structures that determine right- or left-handedness) to external circumstances (babies kept in confined spaces will not learn to crawl in the same way as those with more freedom to move). Our engagement with performance, as with any aspect of our world, will likewise be contingent on the very specific ways that we have come to understand the world and ourselves in body.

It is as this knowing body that I resonate with the subsiding clay of Twomey's pots at the same time as with the performer's effort in lifting the watering can, the melting liquid in Jordan McKenzie's hands at the same time as his upright stance, the bending and swift straightening of the dancer's knees on stage and the suppressed sneeze of the spectator in the seat next to mine, the cushion of my seat and the muggy dustiness of the air. It is as this knowing body that I

⁵⁰ Sheets-Johnstone, 'Steps', p. 194.

engage in my unconscious everyday activities and my conscious reaching out to and receiving of the world.

Knowing in the present

As a knowing body, constantly moving in a constantly moving world, I am continually coming into new knowing. However much I fix my body into habits and my time into routines, I consistently come up against both the contingencies of a changing environment and the gentle, gradual shifts in my body. Each day, each moment I renegotiate my relationship with the world; indeed, this process of continual adaptation is part of the way of being I have learned from my earliest beginnings. Improvisation is at the core of my being. It is therefore necessarily at the base of performance, from the point of view of both spectator and performer. I shall say more below about the experience of presenting and witnessing improvisation as performance, but an improvisatory negotiation with one's own body and the world is central to even the most tightly rehearsed of performances. At each reiteration, there will be a need to adapt to this moment's body state (more or less flexible, more or less tired), this evening's affective tone (more or less anxious, confident or distracted), today's audience (more or less attentive or ready to respond, larger or smaller). Most of this negotiation will be unconscious, the performer subtly adjusting movement, timing, vocal effort as required to produce the closest possible approximation of the work's rehearsed 'ideal' form, as she understands it, in the circumstances of the moment. The spectator will not only be involved in his own improvisatory engagement as he unthinkingly shifts position to find comfort, a better view around the head in front of him, but will also have a sense, however unconscious, of the delicate balancing act between the known and the unknown that brings this moment of performance into being. This bodily, but largely unconscious, understanding of the contingency of timing, relationship to gravity, effort underpins the appreciation of 'liveness', the ever-

present possibility of slips, stumbles or gaps making space for the felicitous emergence of ‘rightness’.

From the moment we come into the world, the processes of growing, maturing, aging, as well as periodic or more persistent illness and/or injury, ensure that we are constantly negotiating towards a new knowing, improvising with the intelligent matter of our bodies, and with the intelligent environment outside our bodies that is itself in ongoing flux. Tim Ingold describes how he learned, as a novice anthropological fieldworker, that knowing is not a matter of receiving and storing information, but ‘a process of active following, of *going along* [...] [it is] not that you know by means of movement but that knowing *is* movement.’⁵¹ Thus it is not enough to cognitively hold an awareness that coming into contact with a hard object will hurt; my moving body draws on the resources of body perception and memory to move without thinking – or perhaps, thinks for itself – in order to avoid pain.

Ingold remarks that the most skilled practitioners are consummate improvisers,⁵² continually adjusting to the finest detail of their material, minutely varying angle, pressure, pace of touch in a constant two-way communication between body (with or without the mediation of tool) and material. ‘Improvisation,’ he suggests, is ‘a necessary part of precision;’⁵³ it is precision, rather than accuracy, that is required in order to negotiate a dynamic environment, and the skilled practitioner is continually adjusting movement to her monitoring of her task.

The practitioner has to improvise... because the conditions under which the thing is made or enacted are never constant. [...] The measure of precision lies in the ability of the practitioner to always adjust or fine-

⁵¹ Ingold, *Making*, p. 1.

⁵² Ingold, *Perception*, p. 347.

⁵³ Tim Ingold, ‘Materials, movement, lines’, Crossing Borders/PAL Movement and Meaning talk, Siobhan Davies Studios, London, 16 November 2011; available at: <<http://www.independentdance.co.uk/programmepage/media/audio/>> (accessed 28 July 2015).

tune their movement in relation to continual monitoring of the task as it unfolds.⁵⁴

This is not a cognitively directed variation of technique or selection from among a range of strategies; rather it is a conversation between body and material (or rather even, between two forms of material) in which experience and ongoing learning are articulated: a body of knowledge, and a coming into knowing, are equally being expressed and formed at this interface. The starting point on the maker's side may be a formal training, but the learning builds through the repeated experience of handling, talking, and most importantly, listening to this or similar material, in this or like ways, over years of practised reiteration. What this practice facilitates is a marrying of body, intention and material that may be cognitively appreciated in retrospect but cannot be consciously willed or directed. The process of making, for the skilled practitioner, is a process of thinking operated through the meeting of body and material. Sculptor Barbara Hepworth described her left hand, holding chisel to stone, as her 'thinking hand':

[my] left hand is my thinking hand. The right is only a motor hand. This holds the hammer. The left hand, the thinking hand, must be relaxed, sensitive. The rhythms of thought pass through the fingers and grip of this hand into the stone.

It is also a listening hand. It listens for basic weaknesses of flaws in the stone; for the possibility or imminence of fractures.⁵⁵

Hepworth's 'thinking' left hand is alive to the movement of the material as it tact-fully explores the potentiality of the stone. This listening lies at the heart and at the sensitive forward edge of the improvisatory process, a listening that is both a deep trust (in body, material, world) and an alive openness to what may arise.

⁵⁴ Ingold, 'Materials'.

⁵⁵ Barbara Hepworth, *Barbara Hepworth: A Pictorial Autobiography* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1985), p. 79.

But it is not only those skilled in particular techniques, of making or of moving, who exhibit this skill in improvising a conversation with the material. Each one of us, in our daily practice of living, is continually addressing the shifting, becoming matter of ourselves and what we perceive as not-ourselves. From birth, we are negotiating the moment-by-moment variation in flows of matter, both in our own growing, maturing, aging – and sometimes injured or sick – bodies, and in the fluid matter of the world. We become experts in our own bodies, in fine-tuning our movement to the exigencies of the moment, automatically negotiating the unevenness of the path under our feet, the precise degree of slipperiness of a bar of soap, the difference in effort required to lift a full or empty cup. And just as we improvise our engagement with the world, the world improvises around and through us, from the air flowing around and into our bodies as we move to the earth that wears flat under the passage of our feet. '[To] improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.'⁵⁶ However practised we are in this engagement, it constantly throws up new circumstances that require us to draw on both our physical experience and our ability to flow, adapt fluidly into change: we improvise as much when we walk down a city street, negotiating other bodies, uneven surfaces, sudden distractions, the weight of a bag in one hand or on a shoulder, as we do when applying more recognised skills in glassblowing, potting, iron forging, handwriting. We are constantly thinking in movement, yet if we attempt to direct this thinking cognitively we may be stalled or even come to grief. Like the craftsperson, we are skilled but also learning, a material knowing coming into being. We apply modalities of movement that we have learned through long apprenticeship with the world itself, but are able to turn them at a moment's notice when required, an entire 'thinking body' like Hepworth's left hand. This fine-tuning of skill as constant improvisation makes us not only expert practitioners of those activities in which we have acquired this deep, material knowledge, but also expert in the skill of improvisation itself. The more expert we become, the more able we are to deal not only with the more or less predictable variation in our environment,

⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 311.

but also with more unexpected contingencies – the person coming towards us without looking, the glass about to fall from the table. The repeated gesture of the performer filling Twomey's pots could appear the epitome of robotic, mechanical identity. But in each repetition, the performer is negotiating the new slipperiness of the floor under her boots, the heavier bucket, the emergent edge of stiffness in a joint to achieve a stability in movement.

This is not to say that we are eternally in a state of unknowing vis-à-vis the matter we engage with, and are. Over a lifetime of practice (whether that be two months, five years or several decades), the matter of our bodies stores memory of the movements of practice. The skilled craftsperson *is* different from the unskilled amateur, in that his body has received, stored and adapted to years of repeated movement in relation to a particular material and craft: 'Concentrated in skilled hands are capacities of movement and feeling that have been developed through life histories of past practice.'⁵⁷ Or as Michel Serres puts it, 'Apprenticeship [...] embeds gestures in the dark of the body [...] to know is to forget.'⁵⁸ But again, this does not only apply to the one with long apprenticeship in a particular art: all bodies carry knowledge built of the memory of past engagement with the world, a particular relationship that depends as much on the individual character of their own material as the physical circumstances in which they practise themselves. The specific thinking-moving that the craftsperson performs is only a particular type of the reflexive process constantly engaged and developed by every body, through short or long apprenticeship of being in the world. '*Familiar dynamics* are woven into our bodies and are played out along the lines of our bodies; they are kinesthetic/kinetic melodies in both a neurological and experiential sense.'⁵⁹

Like the craftsperson, the improvising dancer engages in what Maxine Sheets-Johnstone calls 'thinking in movement'. Like the potter, sculptor, basket-

⁵⁷ Ingold, *Making*, p. 115.

⁵⁸ Serres, *Variations*, p. 58.

⁵⁹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 469 (original emphasis).

weaver, the skilled improviser does not follow a precise design, nor predetermine her movement, but allows her dance to come into being moment by moment, in an ongoing conversation between moving body and the material with which it engages – air, earth, the solids of architecture and/or the organic world, other bodies. Like Hepworth's 'thinking hand', it is her 'thinking body' that brings the dance into being. As Sheets-Johnstone puts it: 'the process of creating [...] is the dance itself.'⁶⁰ But here the mover's body is, too, her own material, a body-mind in movement. It is not so much a matter of a mind manipulating the material of body and world, but rather a polyvocal dialogue: '[it] is as much a matter of the fluid complex [of relationships, qualities and patternings] moving me as it is a matter of me moving it'.⁶¹ She too is in a constant conversation with the potentialities of both her material, substantial body and the material of the world she dances in, through, with. A sprung floor offers her rebound from a landing foot, a twinge in her shoulder draws her arm off the path of a smooth gesture, a fellow-performer's gesture or a cough from the audience suggests a line to branch out on. In the full flow of 'following the material' of body and world, the movement seems to spring from itself, to re-form itself constantly, its currents and eddies twisting and braiding the material flows of bone, muscle, breath, vinyl floor, audience attention. The dancer '[dances] the dance as it comes into being at this particular moment at this particular place.'⁶²

In following their materials, practitioners do not so much *interact* with their materials as *correspond* with them [...]. Making [...] is a process of correspondence, not the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming.⁶³

This drawing forth operates at the constantly renewed edge of knowing, a discovery in each moment that, for the experienced practitioner, crystallises at

⁶⁰ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 421 (original emphasis).

⁶¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 424.

⁶² Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 420.

⁶³ Ingold, *Making*, p. 31.

the point when the process feels 'right' – when the pot arrives in a form that satisfies, the torque on the screw is exactly adjusted, the sculpture tells the sculptor that it is 'finished', the movement articulates a precise and felicitous meeting of body, space, memory and moment.⁶⁴

There is a further development of improvisation as a skill in itself that can be put to work by the artist, and most particularly the performer. A skilled improviser in movement, in music, in spoken word negotiates not just the contingencies impinging on the delivery of a pre-set score or script, but the twists and turns, the aleatoriness, of improvisation itself. As a dancer improvising, I must be constantly open to my direction being changed by the moment-to-moment choices I am making, whether consciously or unconsciously. The gifted improviser is aware of habits of movement and can choose at any moment to adopt or avoid them; she remains open to all possibilities within her grasp as a mover, allowing herself to be surprised at any moment by her own change in direction, level or dynamic, as well as by elements of her environment including any other movers, sound, spectators, surfaces and textures. Throughout she maintains an opening to what the dance 'needs' at each moment, and when her dance chimes with this need, the sense of 'rightness' emerges, perceptible to both herself and spectators as a sweetness of moment, the movement singing. Like the potter in tune with wheel and clay, the sculptor in deep conversation with stone, she finds a 'flow' in which 'self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted'.⁶⁵ The improvising mover (musician, poet) is at one with her movement in a constant oscillation between what Ingold calls 'haptic' and 'optical' engagement,⁶⁶ a close-grained meshing-in with her world and a more distanced awareness of it that allow her to orient her movement without predetermining it.

⁶⁴ This is not to say that the 'right' form is necessarily harmonious, in keeping with classical rules of symmetry, or cultural conceptions of beauty. The 'rightness' is perceived in the moment by maker and, often, by observer.

⁶⁵ Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness* (London: Rider, 1992), p. 71.

⁶⁶ Tim Ingold, 'Materials, movement, lines', *Crossing Borders/PAL Movement and Meaning* talk, Siobhan Davies Studios, London, 16 November 2011; available at: <<http://www.independentdance.co.uk/programmepage/media/audio/>> (accessed 28 July 2015). I am indebted to Kirsty Alexander for this insight.

The recognition of 'rightness', when all elements of the dance come together in a moment of unexpected but absolute clarity, is not a cognitive one but is instantaneously grasped even as the dancer must move on from it if she is to remain open to the possibilities of the ongoing movement. The only ideal the improviser can aspire to is a continual flow of such moments, and this can only occur through her openness to them equally *not* arriving, a desire that is not a desire.

The momentary sensing of 'rightness' is a fleeting experience of wonder, a delight and marvelling in the unique concatenation of elements that make this moment full and whole in itself. The skilled improviser's worldview is similar to that evoked by Ingold in his description of the attitude of peoples who adopt an 'animic ontology': they respond to the unfolding of the world not with surprise (a response based on prediction that is subsequently confounded), but with astonishment, a sense of wonder at the constantly new arriving of the becoming world.⁶⁷ Similarly, the improviser has no predicted outcome in her activity and is therefore unsurprised by its ever-new loops and crossings, but retains a capacity to be astonished, to wonder at and delight in what it presents:

'[Thinking] in movement is a way of being in the world, of wondering or exploring the world directly, taking it up moment by moment and living it in movement, kinetically.'⁶⁸

To set oneself to witnessing this exploration of moving body in moving world, to attend to it, as either mover or spectator, is thus to open oneself to the potential for an unfolding journey of wondering, and wonder.

⁶⁷ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 63.

⁶⁸ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 425.

Conclusion

Ending and beginning in wonder

The improvisatory journeying with the world that, in Ingold's view, brings knowing into being along its course requires a constant openness to contingency, the newness (and now-ness) of each moment. But this does not necessarily mean being continually perplexed and thwarted by the world we encounter. As Ingold suggests, those who remain open to 'a world in continuous birth' do not find themselves being taken unawares by the unexpected, but rather are granted the experience of wonder:

In a world of becoming [...] even the ordinary, the mundane or the intuitive gives cause for astonishment – the kind of astonishment that comes from treasuring every moment, as if, in that moment, we were encountering the world for the first time, sensing its pulse, marvelling at its beauty, and wondering how such a world is possible.¹

This is the wonder to be found in the everyday, in the very existence of the world, and ourselves in it. It is the wonder that rewards the care of attention. Attention represents the ethical-affective mode of Heidegger's 'concern', the involvement with the other things and beings of the world that is inherently part of how we *be* in that world²: 'to attend is to care for.'³ Singular events or presentations of virtuosity (a shooting star, a high-wire act) may stand out, momentarily arresting our attention, but the deeper, more enduring wonder described by Ingold resides in the extraordinary of the everyday, the unique detail of each moment. If we pay attention, any attention, to anything, the world of wonder opens.

¹ Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 63-64.

² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 236-238.

³ Foley Sherman, p. 15.

And if, as I have argued, improvisation is central to the way all of us make our way through our own worlds, this wonder is not restricted to nomadic hunter-gatherers, but is available to each of us, at any time. The open attention to the ever-changing world around me invites me onward on a journey of astonishment. From a momentary recognition of how deftly but unconsciously I have shifted weight to protect my weaker left ankle to marvelling at the intricate complexity of my body's cellular organisation, from an intake of breath as I turn a corner to meet a spectacular storm-washed sky to an intrigued fascination with the texture of the upholstery on the bus seat next to me, wonder at the extraordinary richness and variability of my world, and more profoundly that it, and I, should exist at all, is accessible at every moment. This wonder inhabits the entirety, and every detail, of existence – as Raymond Tallis suggests, 'wonders [...] are wall to wall: a candle flame is not more mysterious than furniture', and the true wonder is that we are not constantly in a state of astonishment.⁴ Again, it has to be emphasised (as Tallis indeed makes clear) that this sense of wonder requires a reflective time-space (even if momentary) that is not necessarily accessible at all times. While highly practised meditators may be able to engage wonderingly even with extreme suffering, the urgency of pain, fear, physical or psychic danger, survival stress, and states of exhaustion, depression or alienation associated with different states of mental health are likely to preclude the possibility of wonder. Moreover, as Tallis also points out, the practical requirements of the day-to-day lives in which we encounter this everyday wonder are rarely such as to make space for it: 'The multitasking hurry that characterizes much of everyday life [...] is remote from wonder.'⁵ Genuine wonder is 'time-consuming',⁶ says Sheets-Johnstone, and not only time-consuming but affectively intense, drawing the wonderer into affective states that may not be entirely

⁴ Tallis, p. 6.

⁵ Tallis, p. 7. Tibetan Buddhist master Pema Chödrön offers a charming description of one of her own masters laying a table, delighting in and precisely refining the smallest gestures of placement, until long past the hour when the meal was to be served. Pema Chödrön, *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness* (London: Element, 2001), p. 94.

⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 291.

comfortable, may indeed at times feel vertiginously unsafe, with their undertones of terror and awe. In wondering *about* the world and ourselves

we open ourselves to unforeseen twists and turns, to outcomes we do not remotely suspect, to feelings we did not know were there, to ideas that are unsettling to our ways of thinking and to our comfortable way of life.⁷

Wonder, Tallis suggests, is 'passive', an experience that 'overcomes you, a state of supreme cognitive grace':⁸ it cannot be summoned at will.

Nevertheless, he goes on to argue, wonder can be cultivated, and is, indeed, 'the proper state of humankind'.⁹ In this sense, it is, as Irigaray suggests, 'both active and passive'.¹⁰ It entails 'knowing how to stop and rest, to leave space between [oneself] and the other, to look towards, to contemplate'.¹¹ For wonder is always at or about the 'other', the different, the beyond-what-is-known – hence its potential for destabilising, disorienting, and even inspiring fear. The practice of making space for wonder involves maintaining an openness to amazement, akin to the attitude of the peoples Ingold describes. In contemporary Western life, this childlike openness to the continually becoming world is most often shut down behind a protective shell of habit, superficial distraction and scepticism or even cynicism, but Ingold argues that it is in fact a powerful resource for engaging with the contingency of existence:

[Those] who are truly open to the world, though perpetually astonished, are never surprised. If this attitude of unsurprised astonishment leaves them vulnerable, it is also a source of strength, resilience and wisdom. For rather than waiting for the unexpected to occur, and being caught out in consequence, it allows them at every moment to respond to the flux of the world with care, judgement and sensitivity.¹²

⁷ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 292.

⁸ Tallis, p. 10.

⁹ Tallis, p. 22.

¹⁰ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 76.

¹¹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 76.

¹² Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 75.

My contention throughout this thesis has been that performance, in its absolute, vanishing presentness, invites the spectator to be vitally present in the same vanishing moment. Equally I have suggested that performance's inherent call to presentness in and to the unfolding moment, to attend to what is being here now, is thus, as Foley Sherman suggests, a call to care for the unrepeatable moment, to receive and engage with it as it is, and hence an opening to the wonder of the yet-to-be-known.

My practice begins in my wonder at the endless intricacies of my own being in the world, and the fine-grained detail of my surroundings. Much of my urge in making this work is to make some offering or invitation in response to these experiences – not to explain or categorise them, but rather to acknowledge and draw attention to them. I have no guarantee that the response of spectators or participants will be in any way similar, and part of the practice of this work is simply to give it place, allowing it to emerge with and through the myriad potential responses to it. One of the privileges of working in performance is its capacity to inhabit the vanishing moment, to confront *all* participants (performers, spectators, backstage and other support teams) with, and simultaneously immerse them in, the continually emerging present of what is happening right now. And as performer/maker, the more open I am to this becoming-being of myself and world in the performance moment (including the possibility of responses that fall outside, or run counter to, my intentions), the deeper the invitation to the spectator to engage with their own experience of the moment.

September 2001. I am sitting on the ground in the midst of a forest, bright-coloured leaves hanging from branches above my head, carpeting the ground in front of me, and every so often dropping softly to earth. The air is still, with an occasional waft of breeze that stirs the undergrowth of smaller bushes and grasses. The quietness of the forest is composed of the myriad buzzings and whirrings of insects, the sigh of

the soft breeze through leaves, the occasional rustle of a small animal in the undergrowth, once or twice the sound of heavier feet of what I imagine to be one of the forest deer in the distance. On a residency in rural Québec, I have given myself the task of sitting in stillness for an hour in the forest, to observe and record what I perceive. Before I began I anticipated that once I had 'exhausted' the visual field in front of me, most of my attention would be focused on my body, the small shifts of weight, discomforts and adjustments, the gradual slump of posture and the increasing heaviness or numbness through the parts of my body resting on the ground. In fact, while these sensations are indeed present and part of my perceptual experience of this hour, my senses are constantly being drawn by external phenomena, my focus becoming more and more specific as I find myself distinguishing increasingly finer details of my environment. So as my gaze returns to the blade of grass that first drew my attention, spotlighted by a shaft of sunlight against the darker background, I notice another, narrower blade behind it, unlit but moving gently in a breeze that does not affect the first one. And then I see the fine line of spider silk that joins the second blade to a nearby tree, whose trunk I have vaguely registered, and that now draws me to examine in more detail the furred texture of the moss growing up its shadowed side. Similarly with the sounds – individual birdsongs become more distinctive, I begin to hear not just the general buzz of insects but to separate individuals near and further away, even, in the quieter moments, the subtle scratch of one or other crawling on a leaf. And scents also come and go in the clear air, sometimes occasional wafts, sometimes more sustained. Within the body sensations I have set myself to attend to I notice increasingly subtle gradations – how what feels like a millimetre shift over my right hip eases a tightness, the slow crawl of a drip from my nose over my upper lip. While my position, and hence my spatial relationship with much of the world around me, remains the same, I consistently find ever new elements of it to focus on: rather than exhausting its potential, and hence remaining outside of it, I am drawn

further and further into an apparently infinite process of revelation. As the hour progresses the exercise ceases to become a 'task' of perception and opens rather into an immersion in a world of sensory detail, to the extent that when the prescribed time is up and I prepare to get up and make my way back towards the residency centre, I find it hard to extract myself from this place, to understand myself as separate from it. As I walk slowly down the track to the road my senses remain hyper-alert, still receptive to some of the finer sounds, smells and visual details even as I register how the crunch of my feet on the path and the relative swiftness of my movement obscure or blur the fine-grained world I have been witnessing.

I am not, of course, entirely surprised by this experience: my reason for embarking on the task was precisely to open up a deep engagement with the world in order to investigate how my own fascination with the fine grain of sensory perception, and its relation to the sense of being in the unfolding world, might be shared with an audience – what kinds of experience I might offer to a spectator that could arouse or encourage a similar engagement.¹³ Two years later I was offered something of such an experience myself, visiting Wolfgang Tillmans' exhibition '*if one thing matters everything matters*' at Tate Britain. In room after room the walls are covered with photographic images, ranging from apparently spontaneous Polaroids and dog-eared prints of compact camera snapshots to elegantly framed, carefully composed high-resolution C-prints, of subjects from a serenely elegiac sunset to an abandoned sock on a radiator, jumbled together in no apparent order. The surfeit is overwhelming, yet completely absorbing as I focus on another image, and another, and another, all the while knowing there are many I am simply not seeing. After perhaps an hour and a half in the galleries, I emerge blinking into

¹³ This research eventually led, among other projects, to the creation of my four-screen video installation *Still Point, Turning World* (2002), which attempts to evoke something of this sitting in openness to the emerging world.

the afternoon light, and the world unfolds before me as if it were washed new, each sensation offering itself up to me for just such intense scrutiny.¹⁴

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone opposes 'wonder at', which she sees as a momentary phenomenon, 'a genuine sense of amazement or astonishment in face of something we read or something we see, hear, touch, smell, or taste'¹⁵ to a 'deep sense of wonder' that she describes as a combined fear and longing in the face of the unknown that drives philosophical contemplation. The first is the wonder of the child 'staring with open-eyed fascination at a fire or a pussy-cat', regularly dismissed as 'idle', the gasp at the acrobat's flight from the high trapeze or the marvelling gaze at the virtuosity of a dancer like Sylvie Guillem.¹⁶ But as Rubenstein suggests, it is in this momentary disorientation that the further enquiry of wondering begins. For Heidegger, she points out, it is the starting point for the *work* of wonder, 'understood transitively', which is neither to abandon the usual for the unusual nor to force the usual to become something else, but rather to see the ordinary and the extraordinary in and through one another, thereby letting what *is* finally *be*.¹⁷

Sheets-Johnstone and Irigaray place wonder at the origin of both scientific investigation and philosophy. Irigaray notes that Descartes himself cites wonder as 'first of all the passions',¹⁸ and hence the source of the desire to find out, the origin of scientific enquiry. For Ingold, the 'art of inquiry', the anthropologist's learning *with* the world, is

grounded in tacit wonder at the exquisite beauty of the natural world, in

¹⁴ See Tate Britain, 'Wolfgang Tillmans: if one thing matters, everything matters', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/wolfgang-tillmans-if-one-thing-matters-everything-matters>> [accessed 16 September 2013]; see also Tate Modern, 'Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/wolfgang-tillmans-2017>> [accessed 18 September 2017].

¹⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 291.

¹⁶ Tallis, p. 9.

¹⁷ Rubenstein, p. 59.

¹⁸ Descartes, quoted in Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 76.

care, attentiveness, and in silent gratitude for what we owe the world for our existence.¹⁹

The child's fascination urges her toward further exploration – it is the adult who, for safety or convenience, snatches her hand back from the flame she moves to touch, or hurries her away from the door handle she is transfixed by. This endless curiosity may be drawn into empirical investigation of the mechanics of being, and as Tallis suggests, eventually lead down the blind alleys of the 'life of the career scientist, lived far from wonder in pursuit of small-scale truths.'²⁰ But the astonishing fact of existence, the question, as Heidegger puts it, of 'Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?'²¹ impels the further enquiry of wondering, pondering the profound mystery of being itself, 'its fundamental and inexhaustible strangeness'.²² The question starts with the 'givenness' of being and of the world, the always-already, unfathomable matter-of-factness of being here. 'Wondering at' contains within it the infinite possibilities of existence and the extraordinary singularity of this particular instance/instant of it (the fact of *this* moment coming into being, out of all possible moments). If novelty, as Sheets-Johnstone, following William James, notes, is central to the feeling of wonder, then wonder is necessarily available in each moment, since change is of the essence of being. And this is true not just in the sense of wonder as 'creative discovery'²³ but in the marvelling *at* that emerges in the contemplation of a solar eclipse, a spider's web or one's own toes. In each of these moments there is not only the extraordinary fact of its existence at all, but that it should exist again and again, yet never in the same form twice.

¹⁹ Tim Ingold, 'From science to art and back again: The pendulum of an anthropologist', *ANUAC*, 5.1 (2016), 5-23 (pp. 10, 19).

²⁰ Tallis, p. 13.

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 1.

²² Foley Sherman, p. xii.

²³ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 286.

Both Ingold and Sheets-Johnstone challenge contemporary scientific certainties – or rather, the version of science that is cited as ‘evidence’ or ‘truth’ and used to justify hegemonic structures of ‘knowledge’ and to restrict exploration or suppress alternative avenues of knowing. This closing down of enquiry is the opposite of wonder, which in Irigaray’s words ‘constitutes an *open* after and before what may surround, embrace’.²⁴ The result, Sheets-Johnstone suggests,

is that the complex *experiential* realities of our everyday lives and of the everyday world are jettisoned in favor of experimental findings and laboratory statistics, computer imagings and modellings of brains [...]. The result is that life, as it is actually lived, recedes into an experiential oblivion.²⁵

Tallis too argues that contemporary science ‘may as often extinguish as awaken wonder’.²⁶ Yet notwithstanding its quest to uncover the empirical ‘truth’ of being, it consistently throws up still more sources of wonder:

physics has revealed that matter, to our everyday eyes the most obvious and boring stuff of the world, is deeply mysterious. The harder physics looks at it, the more mysterious it becomes.²⁷

To attempts to categorise and explain, the world persistently returns ever more reasons to wonder. However well I understand the mechanics of McKenzie’s and Twomey’s performances, I remain drawn in by the unfolding process, the delicacy and density of the temporal environment they create, the shifting resonances in my body and my reflections. However established the structure of my own one-to-one interactions, I am consistently and delightedly engaged by the newness, and potential disruption, of each encounter.

Ingold contrasts contemporary science’s concern with ‘mining’ data and articulating hard ‘facts’ with the anthropologist’s ‘art of inquiry’, an open, curious attitude that does not attempt to pin things down or categorise

²⁴ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 83.

²⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 289.

²⁶ Tallis, p. 13.

²⁷ Tallis, p. 3.

phenomena, but rather follows and journeys with them:

Anthropology, for me, is not about describing the world, or wrapping it up. It is, in the first place, about attending to presence, about noticing, and responding in kind. It means acknowledging that persons and other things are there, that they have their own being and their own lives to lead, and that it behoves us, for our own good, to pay attention to their existence and to what they are telling us. Only then can we learn.²⁸

This attitude might best be described as a kind of listening, a ‘following of the materials’ akin to the listening of Barbara Hepworth’s left hand, of the blacksmith’s precisely adjusted hammer strokes,²⁹ of the dancer’s intense yet lightly focused openness to her own body’s movement. As Ingold describes it, it is a full bodily entanglement with the world, rather than a distanced, ‘objective’ observation of it. It means committing to living in ‘the creative poverty of not yet knowing’,³⁰ where every discovery opens onto further paths of enquiry. The improvisatory, curiously enquiring journey is inherently one of wonder; conversely, being open to wonder inherently demands a readiness to improvise in the face of contingency.

To be open to wonder, then, entails remaining persistently, and consciously, in the present moment, allowing what is becoming to unfold, exposing oneself to the possibility of being ‘overcome’ by wonder but equally finding oneself ready for whatever transpires. Wonder itself may have a sense of timelessness, the experience of extraordinariness (even in the most mundane detail of existence) not only overlaying superficial concerns with timetables but also standing outwith any containment or definition in temporal frames. But wonder is an experience of the present moment. The most short-lived astonishment is yet a moment of absolute presence. Even when it is a product of the kind of philosophical reflection encouraged by Sheets-Johnstone, Irigaray and Tallis, ‘wonder is not an act; it is a feeling, a spontaneous affective bodily happening

²⁸ Ingold, ‘From science’, p. 12.

²⁹ Ingold, *Perception*, p. 353.

³⁰ Eugen Fink, quoted in Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 283.

that is *felt*.³¹ As such wonder itself is necessarily in the present, even if its object is in the past. It arises out of a present consciousness, a mindfulness, or a bringing to mind, of my own experience of the phenomena I am engaging with. It requires both full engagement with the object of wonder and a recognition of strangeness:

Might [wonder] be the always recovered time of the *present*? The bridge, the stasis, the *instance*? Where I am no longer in the past and not yet in the future. The land of passage between two closed worlds, two defined universes [...] Wonder might be the advent or the event of the other.³²

Wonder here becomes a held breath (which indeed it may elicit, in a sudden, transfixing moment), ‘a kind of suspended animation, a balance and tension between a passive mood and an incipiently perceptual and active mood’, as Howard Parsons puts it.³³

Tallis’s exhortation to cultivate wonder, ‘to place yourself in a position to receive the gift of overwhelmed amazement’,³⁴ posits it as an act of consciousness, a response to any reflection on existence. That this is a political concern is clear from Sheets-Johnstone’s trenchant observation that ‘[when] we turn away from wonder, we turn away from the possibility of discovering fundamental aspects of our freedom.’³⁵ For Irigaray, wonder is the beginning of an ethics of relationship, for it acknowledges that the other is always beyond our containment:

The other never suits us simply. [...] An excess resists. [...] Wonder is before and after appropriation. [...] While attracting me towards, wonder holds me back from taking and assimilating directly to myself.³⁶

³¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 292.

³² Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 77.

³³ Howard L. Parsons, ‘A philosophy of wonder’, *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*, 30.1 (1969), 84-101 (p. 94).

³⁴ Tallis, p. 10.

³⁵ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 291.

³⁶ Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 77.

The disturbing, unassimilable otherness of the other demands that we make ourselves open to strangeness:

The unfamiliar [...] troubles the heart of the familiar, turning the self inside out and holding it open as unconditional hospitality – as the ‘welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me.’³⁷

This ethics, in Ingold’s view, extends to all investigation of the world:

The responsible search for truth demands that care and curiosity go together. They are really two sides of the same coin. [...] Is not curiosity a way of caring?³⁸

Respectful attention to the other inherently implies the kind of care evoked by Foley Sherman, but in so doing opens up the world rather than containing it, revealing it as ever more mysterious and wonderful: ‘the care of attention will not draw a roadmap. It will instead lead to wonder.’³⁹ My efforts to hold a listening space for my co-participants in *audience*, in *Handover*, in *Talking Matter*, are continually rewarded by unrepeatable moments of meeting with newness and strangeness in our common-being.

For Maxine Sheets-Johstone, the process of wondering our being-in-the-world (as a philosophical task) is a collective enterprise, a communal practice of weaving, an ‘infinite task’ within which our individual wonderings create patterns and draw threads that may be taken up and rewoven by other wonderings but never arrive at a conclusive form: ‘our weavings are both alterable and interminable. We never finish wondering.’⁴⁰ For Ingold, this collective weaving is life itself, a process in which we ‘have, perpetually, never-endingly and collaboratively, to be creating ourselves’, ‘not [human] *beings* but [...] *becomings*’, weaving ‘a kind of tapestry [that is] never

³⁷ Rubenstein, p. 78. This is Rubenstein’s gloss on Lévinas’ *Totalité et infini*.

³⁸ Ingold, ‘From science’, p. 19.

³⁹ Foley Sherman, p. 17-18.

⁴⁰ Sheets-Johstone, *Primacy*, p. 281.

complete, never finished.⁴¹ If we are at home in our improvisatory wayfinding through the world, we move with a bodily wondering through a similarly wondering environment, each *being* alive with a trusting openness. And ultimately, this wondering is crucial to life, in Irigaray's view, being the source of desire: 'the living being needs wonder in order to move'.⁴²

Both Tallis and Ingold point to art as a path of engagement with the world that can reveal it anew, momentarily restoring the mystery by which we were continually entranced as infants. Tallis suggests that art offers an invitation to step out of the distractions of persistent busyness and fatigue, and to re-engage with the infinite mystery of the everyday world, 'to look at things as they are in themselves'.⁴³ For Ingold art, like anthropology, 'is an opening on the world rather than an attempt at closure – an opening that exposes the practitioner to its trials and to its gifts'.⁴⁴ In stepping back from routine engagement with the world, it opens another gaze, making the world strange once more: 'through art we enter others' worlds and return to our own as strangers with an unpeeled gaze'.⁴⁵

If this is so, the communal space of performance might offer an invitation to share in the potential for such everyday wonder. The profound wonder that Tallis, Serres and Irigaray evoke is not the easy amazement at virtuosity or technical ingenuity aroused by spectacle; it is rather the sense of a new space opened by a particular light shed on the familiar, a vertiginous void or cliff edge momentarily before me. That I may experience this alongside others whose response is very different is not the least part of its wonder: being part of a collective audience offers a reminder both that wonder is a gift bestowed without restriction, and that an essentially similar ensemble of components, making up what we understand as a human being, can be so singularly

⁴¹ Tim Ingold, 'Prospect', in *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, ed. by Tim Ingold and Gisli Pálsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-21 (p. 8).

⁴² Irigaray, *Éthique*, p. 76.

⁴³ Tallis, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Ingold, 'From science', p. 12.

⁴⁵ Tallis, p. 11.

configured that each person's experience of a particular event or moment is unique. The range of individual responses within a collective audience may be vast: there is no saying that what I find moving, fascinating or wonderful will not be irritating, or tedious, to the person beside me. Yet while our sense of our own consciousness is that it is absolutely distinct from all others, our understanding is that we have the experience of consciousness in common. And while I recognise that the other's strangeness is rooted in the absolute impenetrability of their experience, shared witnessing in performance can open the possibility of individual responses resonating with one another, or collectively. Thus if I cannot extrapolate my sense of the moment of settling in *audience* to those who sit opposite me, the written and spoken responses of participants offer evidence that in many cases *something* shifts, often profoundly, for them. If I cannot say that the person sitting beside me feels as I do when contemplating Clare Twomey's simple, profound image, the restful quiet in the space suggests a shared depth of attention where the image resonates through a collective body. While we may not be able to say precisely *what* we have shared, we have shared something, and this in itself is both ordinary and extraordinary.

Moreover, the ontology of performance as existing uniquely in its moment, and differently in each successive moment, means that engaging with it necessarily involves negotiating contingency. Performance lives in change, its journey through time taking in the accidents, large and small, of each moment. It requires that participants – performers and spectators both – journey with it, following the twists and turns of matter, the specific temporality of each element. Part of the pleasure of watching highly technical performance is witnessing skilled performers negotiate these shifts, even in tightly scripted or choreographed work – subtly adjusting timing to accommodate another's slight delay, modifying orientation to take in an awkward placement of set, shading the tone of a phrase in response to the mood they perceive in the audience, so that the whole, while recognisably the 'same' performance as the night before and the night after, is nevertheless wholly unique. Though as spectators we

may not perceive the detail of their fine-tuning, the sense of ‘liveness’ that emerges derives from this negotiation of circumstance in the moment, a ‘vibration’ that can only be experienced in its arising between the bodies of performer and spectator.⁴⁶

In my own practice, I seek to embrace and explore this contingency. As I noted in the introduction, performance is for me more a way of finding out than of presenting something already known, an investigation of my own capacities and the movement of the materials I may be working with, of the physical and emotional workings of endurance and affective labour in my body, of relationship with an ongoing series of unique strangers. If I set up a frame or context, it is so that within it I can find out what happens when I continue increasing the weight I am carrying until I can’t walk, or how my posture and gestures change when I sit knitting for 24 hours. It is also so that I can make these bodily processes in some way apparent to the spectator/participant in the moment they arise, whether gradual or unexpected. By the same token, the work is open to the intervention of others, which may be as subtle as the shift in my consciousness and posture when a new spectator walks in, in *Longshore Drift*, or as radical as the unexpected contributions from spectators in *Second Skin*: the tone and focus of the piece shifted markedly for me when first one child and then several others approached me to offer stones to put in my pockets. The one-to-one performances extend this possibility further, inviting contributions within a specific rubric but (at least in theory) open to all potential responses.⁴⁷ *Talking Matter*, the most recent of these, is also the most open-ended: while the conversation has a notional starting point, it has ranged over subjects as widely varied as the individual contributors, from making dumplings in Trinidad to the bodily inheritance of a mother’s hands, and the clay ‘outcomes’ are equally varied.⁴⁸ The conversation, material and verbal, in

⁴⁶ Nick Ridout, ‘Welcome to the Vibratorium’, *Senses & Society* 3.2 (2008), 221-231.

⁴⁷ I am of course aware that the performance setting, and the self-selected nature of participants, is likely to mean that these responses fall within the declared expectations of the interaction.

⁴⁸ For images of some of the ‘conversation pieces’ that have been formed through this interaction, see Appendix 2b, ‘Talking Matter documentation’.

Talking Matter partakes of what Ingold calls 'correspondence', a fluid interplay of perception and response:

To correspond with the world [...] is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to *answer to it*. [...] it is to mix the movements of one's own sentient awareness with the flows and currents of animate life.⁴⁹

The strands of correspondence in *Talking Matter* include, but are not limited to, the participant and myself, the clay, the seats we sit on, the room we are in, the temperature and humidity of the air, all mutually meeting and intertwining with one another. Like the flows of correspondence in the world, the conversation has no particular destination, and no end-point other than the arbitrary time limit imposed by the performance context: '[Correspondence] is about living *attentionally* with others. [...] It is neither given nor achieved but is always in the making.'⁵⁰

In this embracing of contingency, I aim to re-engage with the fullness of each present moment of my bodily being/becoming in a continually emerging world, and to open a space that invites the participant/spectator to engage with their own experience of this moment. The performances I have reflected on in this thesis offer me just such an invitation. The simplicity and complexity, the ordinariness and extraordinary generosity of breath, breathing and air, including my own participation in that flow, alongside the unfathomable paradox of dying as we are living, and living because we are dying, are crystallised for me in McKenzie's performance. The endless flux of matter in which my own bodily substance participates is brought into relief in Twomey's work. In the close-up interaction with another subject in the one-to-one exchanges of Pinchbeck, Dobkin and Rotozaza, I am exposed to myself, called into an ethical relationship of listening not only with the other but also with myself. And if performance has this potential to draw us into engagement with the present moment, with our own selves, with the world as it is, with the

⁴⁹ Ingold, *Making*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ Tim Ingold, 'That's enough about ethnography!', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4.1 (2014), 383-395 (p. 389).

strangeness and familiarity of the other, by this token it can also provide an opening onto our wondering of the extraordinariness of that existence. Being witnessed in the company of others (whether as collective audience or as one of a series of individual participants), it can allow us also into the wonder of the commonality of being, sharing the matter and the movement of existence. The importance of practice – of performance and of art in general – lies at least in part in its capacity to offer understandings of the world that lie outside (beneath, before, beyond, within) what we have words for, breaking open the linguistic straitjackets that habitually contain experience and, as Serres suggests, shut down our improvisatory wondering.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone asks whether philosophy might 'begin (and end) in wonder'.⁵¹ My suggestion is that performance, through its peculiar ontology of becoming presentness, casts into relief the extraordinary fact of being present, and thereby invites a wide-eyed curiosity about being-in-the-world. The examples I have reflected on here offer particular insights into aspects of embodied being-in-the-world (being-with a human other, the perennial action of breathing, the fluid materiality of embodied being), but it is through their existence as performance, in the fleeting present moment of their passing, that they draw the spectator into her own presentness. By drawing attention to the present moment of meeting, of becoming, the kinds of performance I have reflected on here equally invite a care for what is being right now, a care that is underlain by the special relationship of attention in the present moment that performance always already embodies. They thus reveal how by its very nature, by its insistently present passing, performance establishes the ground for a profoundly ethical relationship not only with the human other (performer, spectator) but with the world, and myself in our becoming, and in this open-ended engagement opens the gates to wonder.

⁵¹ Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy*, p. 279.

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- Face Game*, artist unknown, one-to-one performance, Battersea Arts Centre, 2010
- Franko B, *You Me Nothing*, installation, Battersea Arts Centre, 2010
- French & Mottershead, *Waterborne*, immersive soundwork, Thames foreshore, 2016
- Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled (Prayers) 1996-2005*, performance, South London Gallery, March 2005
- Gomme, Rachel, *audience*, one-to-one performance, 2005-2013. First presented at Abbey Taxi, Cambridge
- , *Handover*, one-to-one performance, 2011. First presented at Manual, London
- , *Hour (for Penelope)*, durational performance, 2010. First presented at Hatch, Leicester
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- , *Mouth to Mouth*, one-to-one performance, 2012. First presented at Siobhan Davies Studios, London
- , *Suspend*, sound installation and performative interaction, Chester Cathedral, 2008
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- Kings of England, *I Vow to Thee My Country*, one-to-one performance, Battersea Arts Centre, 2010
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